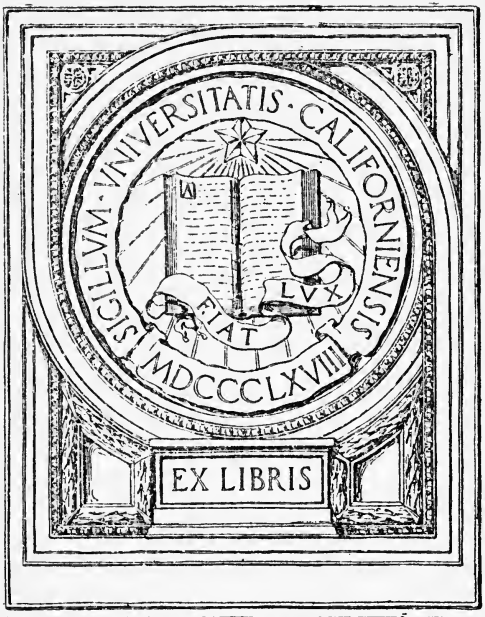
AUNT AMITY'S SILVER WEDDING

RUTH McENERY STUART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AUNT AMITY'S SILVER WEDDING

"An' dey offer me fifty dollars cash down"

AUNT AMITY'S SILVER WEDDING

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

RUTH McENERY STUART

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TO

MY BROTHER

JAMES A. McENERY

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OF course Aunt Amity would never have thought of such a thing herself. It was the great silver wedding up at Judge Stanley's that put it into her head.

The Stanleys were the richest people along the coast, and they lived in the finest house, at the top of the highest hill,—not much of a hill, it is true; but no matter,—and when all the lights were lit in this mansion of many windows, it was a sight good to behold for miles around on a dark night.

And the Stanleys had no end of relations and friends,—all more or less rich,—and they had always entertained extensively, so that everybody was delighted to come and

to make a generous showing at the silver wedding.

For a week before the time, express packages had been coming in, and a few belated even for the fortnight following; for there were family connections across-seas, and silver cannot be flashed along with congratulations with or without wires, at least not yet.

Of course there was a great banquet at the judge's silver wedding.

There were always banquets at important social functions in the old South. None of your "butter thins," your "peanut sandwiches," "cheese-straws," and "woman's exchange kisses," the most over-feminized, inane refreshment imaginable—and tea—and tea—and tea!

No, no. None of this sort of thing, but groaning mahoganies and popping corks and the whir of ice-cream freezers in action; important darkies in white linen, bearing

great trays: razor-backed hams boiled in champagne; turkeys, boned and truffled; pâtés of native game; and fruits; and confectionery; and—and all the rest of it—great spirals of smoke out of the kitchen chimneys all day and half the night before; and sweet-smelly breezes down the road for half a mile on a windy day.

The Stanley silver wedding was the talk of three parishes for months afterward, and the reports that went abroad,—of the costumes of the guests, who came all the way from New Orleans, and of the presents, and presents, and presents,—well, some of them were hard to believe.

Amity was not one of the Stanley's former slaves. Indeed, she had come into the coast community only a few years before the wedding. She lived with her little husband, Frank the fiddler, on a place some miles farther up the river, and as the affiliations of the two places were with

small towns in opposite directions, there was little or no intercourse between them. And so when, several months after the big wedding, Amity announced that she and Frank were going to "give one," it was not at all as if she were imitating a home function.

Any couple may have a silver wedding,—any, that is, that is qualified,—and when Amity proclaimed their eligibility, she and Frank immediately came into a new prestige.

She was young for her age, was Amity—young for any age which might seize silver-wedding honors. She looked thirty-three, and could not have been much over forty, and while she proudly announced the telltale approaching anniversary, one could not help reflecting how few of our own skins would be willing to celebrate silver weddings at forty, if they could.

Although it was the glow of mid-life

which polished her brown cheek, Amity moved with the alacrity of youth, and her ringing laughter was as care-free and fresh as a child's. She was so brown, so truly chocolate in hue, that when she smiled, displaying a streak of white, it seemed that she might really be chocolate, and all cream inside. If she was forty years old and over, she had lived every year of the forty, and she was glad of it.

She had always been a woman of initiative, of faculty, and of strong social following. Her cabin at Three Forks, surrounded on all sides by a broad, floorless veranda, otherwise "a shed," which invited friendly weather protection for chance guests without number or stint, always seemed in a sense typical of her own generous personality. And it had been so before she furnished it with rows of little pine tables upon which she served cakes and ginger-pop for a price during week-

day summer afternoons, with a fish-fry every Saturday night for *grand finale.*

She was a famous cook, and her fish-fries were popular on their own account, so that a good many of the dollars paid out to the hands on Saturdays floated into the capacious pockets of her broad checked aprons, and thence to her luxury-loving mate, Frank the fiddler.

Still, prices were absurdly low, and it was a trifling business financially, so that she had no more saved at the year's end than had her neighbors, who handled so much less than she, and who regarded her as a money-eyed lady of affairs. When she said, in answer to question, "Oh, yas, cert'n'y de business pays," she meant what she said. Any enterprise which runs along without debt pays. It pays its own expenses.

When she announced the proposed silver wedding, and began sending out invitations right and left, the entire levee-front for the

space of ten miles was in a broad grin. Of course everybody wanted to come.

Amity rather intelligently made good her claim as to the date, explaining that, although the judge's lady would never remember her, she did distinctly recollect when, as Miss Bettie Peabody of St. James Parish, she had married the young lieutenant Stanley, just back wounded from the war,—all this was history,—and that a few months later she was herself married. The date of her own wedding she might have forgotten except that it was April Fool's day, and everybody had joked her and the groom, wondering which might fool the other by failing to "show up" in church. One can understand how she would never forget this.

Yes, the date seemed fairly well established; but if it had n't been, what would have been the difference?

When she trudged all the way up the road to confer with the mistress of Sugar-

sweet Plantation about it; to enlist interest, get pointers and the support of enlightened approval—she was free now, and need not ask permission,—she trod the levee summit with an air of fresh importance, and her waddle was that of a gleeful duck with a pond in sight, for Amity seemed never so truly in her element as when she was the center of social activity. Indeed, it was its social aspect more than the lure of the pennies which had inspired her business enterprise, although she herself probably did not realize this.

The winds of March were sharp and inspiriting, and when they flapped the ends of her bandana over her ears as she walked, she chuckled with very exhilaration of life. Indeed, she even laughed, seeing the breadth of her own shadow:

"Nobody, to see dat wide shadder, would take me for de light dancer I is."

She had taken her big palmetto fan along

with her,—the "chu'ch s'ciety fan," bound with purple ribbon,—not that she needed a fan in the March wind, but it helped her along, temperamentally. Indeed, it did really serve occasionally to ward off a too-sharp gust which threatened her ears.

If her friend and counselor, the mistress, was surprised at her announcement, or amused or pleased or displeased, she leniently gave no sign. She had often declared herself "used to all the surprises there were in plantation life and ways," so that nothing, no matter how novel, had power more than to throw one of her eyebrows somewhat askew, thus imparting a quizzical expression to her otherwise orderly face while she lent herself to any unusual recital.

She let Amity tell her all about it—how she was going to invite "any and all who would come wid a good will, *and a good present befittin' de occasion.*"

For a second only she lost control of her eyebrow, as, in reply to this, she asked:

"And do you really expect everybody to bring you a silver present, Amity? You know, silver things are expensive."

"Yas 'm, I knows dey is; an' so is fine suppers expensive an' I ain' gwine give no scrub ban-quet. Dey ain't nobody but can offo'd to fetch some little silver piece—"

"Such as what?"

"Well, mostly dimes an' two-bitses [quarters] an' maybe fifty-centses; an' it mought be dat a few would drap us a dollar. I done give out dat I ain' gwine stint de supper. I 'll have every kind o' cake dey is—an' fried chicken—an' chicken-pie—an' chicken fricassee—an' chicken-salad—an' chick—I mean to say, an' swimp gumbo an' beat biscuit, an'—swimps is comin' in thick in the river now."

"Oh, I see; certainly. I had n't thought of money. I was thinking of—"

"You was studyin' about white weddin's, Missy. Dat 's a white horse of another color. Eh, Lord! How many th'ough an' th'ough silver soup-ladles an' tea-sets you reckon I 'd git, ef I expected 'em? No, honey; dis here 's gwine be jes a done-over ole breakdown weddin', wid a' overdone brokedown bride an' groom. But we can't be no younger 'n we is, an' hit 's now or never, or—"

Her own laughter broke the sentence here, but in a minute she had veered, and her voice was entirely serious when she asked:

"An' so—is you got air ole bride's veil left over f'om past times—or wreath—or anything flimsy an' white, please, ma'am—to set off dis ole secon'-han' bride? An' maybe one o' Marse Honoré's white waistcoats for Frank—anything, so it 's white, for bofe of us—so 's we won't shame de ban-quet. I don't crave to disgrace de feast wid onproper weddin'-gyarmints.

"An' maybe somebody mought affo'd a silver weddin'-ring for me,—I ain' nuver had no ring,—or no silver thimble, nuther. I sho' does hope dey 'll fetch in a few showy plush-box deviltries, even ef de silver on 'em 'll melt whilst you looks at it.

"I had a silver-plated soup-dipper, once-t. I got it for a tea-prize. I nuver drinks no tea. I buys it jes for de prize cowpons—an' trades it back in de sto'e for tobacco.

"But dat prize dipper sho' did look dazzlin' when it come, reposin' in dat plush-tufted box. I cert'in'y was tickled! But one day I dipped out some lye-hominy wid it, an' it must 'a' slid down in de pot an' b'iled all day. I tell yer, Missy, hit went in white but it come out a good mulatter-color.

"Frank say de silver all subsided into de hominy an' we-all e't it up, so we 's silver-coated inside ef we is copper-plated on de outside.

"But I sho' does wusht I had it now, in all its plush glory for de weddin'.

"It 'd be a fine side-boa'd piece—ef I had a side-boa'd.

"You can't have but one silver weddin' in a lifetime, an' I wants to have it racklass, whilst I 'm a-havin'! Even ef you stays heah long enough to have two, dey say de silver turns to gold, an' Gord knows what a po' ole nigger resurrected bride would do for gold presents—less'n luck changes!

"But maybe, seein' it 's silver, somebody *mought* ricomember to buy me a thimble—or a breastpin. Ole Hannah, de Williamson's cook, she got a lovely brooch, a silver fryin'-pan. It makes you hongry to look at it. Ef somebody only thought enough o' me—"

"And how about Frank?" the mistress interrupted. "This is his wedding, too, you know. I should think he might like a silver-headed walking-cane, or a match-box—"

Amity warded off this suggestion with her hand.

"No, no! Frank ain't got no title to none o' dese silver presents. Not Frank!"

"Not Frank? I don't understand. Is n't Frank your husband?"

"Oh, yas 'm; of co'se he 's my chu'ch husban' all right, *but not dat husban'!*"

The mistress's wayward eyebrow described several eccentric curves before it found itself again, and she could ask evenly:

"And do you mean to say—"

"Yas 'm, I means to *say what I say.* I ain't been married to Frank Stillwater on'y jes about five yeahs. An' I been studyin' about dat, too, an' dat 's one o' de p'ints I come to insult you about. Sence Frank is been married five yeahs, I don't see why he can't draw for a *wood* weddin'. Dey tell me five yeahs o' marri'ge is de wooden universary, an' dat 's de easiest weddin' dey could give on a plantation, a wooden one is."

"But not dat husban'!"

"Why, yes. There are so many little wooden things which are useful and cheap."

"Yas 'm; an' jes plain *wood*. What 's de matter wid a load o' fire wood or fat pine for kindlin'? Frank would be glad to git anything, f'om a box o' matches to a hen-coop; an' he gwine fiddle for 'em free, anyhow."

"A new fiddle would be a suitable wooden present for Frank, would n't it?"

"Yas 'm, or a' ole one. But, law, chile, dey won't be no sech as dat! A pair o' butter-paddles or a rollin'-pin 'll be about de top o' dat list.

"But heah I 'm gwine on an' forgittin' all about de bridal veil! Is you got any ole lace left-overs, Missy, dat I mought wear for a veil? I 'll do it up keerful an' fetch it back."

The mistress hesitated for just a moment. Then she said:

"Before I promise, Amity, tell me a little

more. What became of your first husband? Where is he?"

"Dat 's a' easy one," the woman laughed; "leastways, half of it 's easy. 'What become of Solon?' A triflin' yaller gal stole 'im f'om me. Dat 's what *become* of 'im; an' I don't begrudge 'im to her. But as to whar he *is*, Gord knows, honey. Livin' or dead, he 's all one to me now. Last time I heerd tell of 'im, he was waitin' on Frank's sister, down in Freetown. He mought be my brother-in-law by now, for all I know. But you 'll gi'e me de bridal veil, won't you, Mistus?"

There was something so infantile in the face which looked into hers—something so naïve in the whole affair—maybe it was the mistress's duty to read this woman of primal instincts a sermon on morals—morals as taught in the churches and "followed afar off" by the more enlightened. Maybe she was very wrong to do it, but she promised

without demur, and the bride who appeared at the silver wedding, a fortnight later, was resplendent in veil and wreath, and the ceremony was performed with the coveted ring of pure silver, sent down from the great house with best wishes and congratulations.

The silver wedding of the quarters was evidently modeled after that of the judge's mansion, as several of its salient features were repeated. It may have been that the Chinese lanterns which hung in rows from the porch rafters, within its inclosure of young pines cut from the wood, were the identical ones which had so recently done similar duty at the more important function, and, as the lesser house, with its surrounding balconies, was a humble copy of the other, albeit there were no Corinthian columns or cornice under its eaves, the general effect when the lights were lit and the function "in full blast." was much the same.

It happened that the Methodist bishop

of the African circuit, a stranger of high repute, was in the neighborhood,—that is, he was within a day's drive,—and it was no trouble to get him to come and officiate.

Needless to say, the place was crowded. Indeed, it was jammed uncomfortably, so that the two rosetted ushers were kept busy thinning out the galleries and opening a passage for bride and groom, who were to slip out the back door separately, and, making a tour of the house on the outside, meet and join hands at the front door, and enter the inclosure together.

This parade was Amity's idea, and it was a good one in that it would afford everybody a view of bride and groom, with the charm of ceremony.

The bishop, a slender, slope-shouldered man of negative coloring, would have failed of impressiveness but for his unusual height. He must have been six feet four, certainly; and here again was his dignity jeopardized

by a grotesque incongruity between the length of his person and the exceeding brevity of the ministerial robe, which struck him about the knees.

But a deep sonorous voice of authority is all-compelling and at his first words no one knew or cared anything about the length of the bishop's gown or his legs.

It was easy to understand before he had spoken three minutes why he had been made bishop. Resonant, musical, forceful, his voice seemed to select his words as if they were jewels which he prodigally threw out among his hearers, even the commonest pebble among them taking a sparkle as it left his eloquent lips. One cannot help wondering what such a one might achieve as an orator if his language were shorn of dialect and freed from the limitations of illiteracy. And yet there are compensations in all things.

To him who listens sympathetically, is

there not sometimes a pathos in ignorance, and does not broken speech hold an appeal which is essentially its own?

It was a new ceremony, this—new to everybody, priest and people. The common expectation was that the bridal couple would step forward, that the bishop would lift his arms and bless them, and then the social evening would begin.

But not so. This was an opportunity for the orator, a chance not to be thrown away. When the pair had paraded the outer rim of the pine inclosure, met at the front door, and, joining hands, walked demurely in over the strip of carpet laid for the purpose, and taken their stand upon the rug before the small table behind which waited the bishop, all as prearranged, he lifted his arms for a moment only, and with an almost imperceptible "Sh-h-h-h-h!" commanded silence. And then, as nearly as the writer can recall, he began in this wise:

"In de mornin' of life, when de sun is in de eastern sky, de shadders is long todes de west.

"When dis yo'ng couple, no mo' 'n boy an' gal, jedgin' by dey looks to-day—when dey stood togedder in the sunrise, ef dey had looked behind 'em, dey 'd 'a' seen de long shadders of 'spe'ence, an' maybe lost courage. But dey did n't look back. Dey faced de sunlight wid shinin' faces.

"An' now, at life's midday, standin' out in de clair light of noon, so to speak, dey 's free to look bofe ways—for dey ain't no shadders in sight. Ef de pink promises of youth is faded, so is also de long shadders gone out. De oniest shadders dey is is *under dey feet.* Now is de day o' fulfilment and, by de grace o' Gord, dey stands in it, *once mo', togedder!*

"An' as it draps into de evenin', ef dey 'll still keep dey eyes faithfully turned todes de sun, de shadders 'll be bound to stay behind

'em ag'in; *an' dey 'll pass out at last in glory, th'ough de golden gate o' sunset!*"

The bishop had evidently not been coached. At each reference to the young couple of the early marriage, the sensitive spectator might have realized a slight atmospheric disturbance; but it was not serious. Manners are manners, even on a sugar plantation in the Louisiana bottom-lands, and a function of high form could not be broken by failure of etiquette.

The bishop had the floor and all the company were invited guests of those whom he so unconsciously lifted into the light of question.

Certainly the wedding couple could not have been accused of deception, as the size of many of the parcels which towered over the shoulders of the impatient guests proclaimed their contents to be of wood rather than silver.

It did not really make much difference

"Th'ough de golden gate o' sunset!"

what the bishop said, so long as he spoke in figures, and while the aroma of the feast was permeating the place, so that brevity seemed the only thing to be desired.

And he was too clever to wax prolix even if he would. After the address, things moved rapidly enough. In a moment, bride and groom had knelt and received the blessing of the church; the ceremony was done and over, and all trivialities forgotten in the stir of novelty and of expectation.

Amity proved her faculty in the completeness with which everything had been arranged. In a few moments one of the ushers had announced the route of the procession, which was to pass by in single file, bestowing the gifts in order. Accommodations were even provided for extra bulky parcels in the open fireplace, with a youth waiting to convey them thither.

For the convenience of contributors of coins, a glass preserve-jar, in the metal

top of which a slot had been cut, stood on the table at the side of the bride. She had tried to arrange a bell within the jar, so that every contribution should ring into place, but this was a failure, and she had been obliged to put up with the ordinary clink of the silver as it fell. The jar, or other securely covered receptacle, was really necessary in a crowd like this, in a community where passing the hat in church had had to be abolished because of the occasional peculations from it by such as professed to be "making change" during its passage. It had proved a little too easy to drop in a quarter and take out, say, thirty-five cents.

When contributions began to come in tonight, the groom, who suggested nothing so much as an animated grin, announced that he was provided with change for any who might desire it. Also, into each hand as it dropped a coin into the jar he was pleased to place a "supper ticket," for presenta-

tion at the table later. So did Amity's astute management forestall any schemes of the over-greedy to eat more than one supper, although, if the truth must be told, it was freely said afterward that there were several who did actually press themselves again into the procession and by dropping a paltry "picayune," draw a second seat at the banquet. But this may not have been true, and even if it were, perhaps, it has its counterpart for chicanery in frenzied finance in circles of higher rating.

Amity made a great picture as she stood in the place of honor. She had thrown back her veil, as it was in the way, and her happy face was good to behold while she frankly welcomed each guest with both hands extended—shaking with one and taking with the other.

While most gifts of silver were in the shape of coins, a few resplendent boxes arrived, with showy furnishings, "mag-

nificently washed" with the required metal. The mistress had seen to it that the bride should not be put to shame through neglect.

The collection of wooden things was really surprising, and a few of them mirth-provoking in their suggestions.

The occasion was a brilliant success, exceeding the most ambitious hopes of its ambitious hostess, from first to last—or at least from first until nearly the last, when something happened.

The supper had been served in relays, the back porch being reserved for this purpose, one set of guests, as it was filled, giving place to another, and the last tables were nearly done when there was a sound,—or was it a sound?—footsteps coming in out of the night, footsteps strange and alien, which seemed to be felt rather than heard. The stranger, out of sympathy with the indoor spirit, although he moved noiselessly, had no need of announcement, for the people

moved back, giving him right of way by a sort of intuitional avoidance.

An oldish man—dark, stocky, alert, lowering, he wore a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, so that when he looked before him he seemed to stare. In the middle of the room he stopped, and after looking about him for a moment, he said:

"Whar de bride?"

The voice was low, but incisive, and although he moved silently, there was that in his bearing which was unpleasant—a sort of surety of himself, as if he were quite conscious of power—a disagreeable thing when it is undefined.

Amity was standing with a group of her friends when they called her. Seeing her coming, the visitor advanced to meet her, his hat still low over his eyes. He did not extend his hand. He simply said, when she had come quite up to him:

"Well, Amity?"

It may seem like straining a point to say that a chocolate cheek flushes, and yet who that has witnessed the swift change from brown to blackish gray in such a face in the crisis of sudden panic can deny that it changes color? It is as definite and as effective to convey embarrassment as the most florid stain which rushes to a lady's discomfiture, painting her face with shame.

So was the smiling countenance of Amity Stillwater, the bride, suddenly suffused with trouble when she met and recognized her guest, and the voice which answered was metallic and feelingless.

"What does you want heah?" This was all it said.

"I got a little business," was the reply,—"a little business wid de business manager of dis show, whoever he is—de bishop, I reckon."

By this time Amity had recovered herself.

She was even able to feign a smile when she replied:

"I 's my own business man—an' ef you wants to see me, come dis way." And as she turned from her friends, she said playfully, over her shoulder: "Wrop up a little piece o' de weddin'-cake by de time we comes back, please. Dis gentleman 'll take a piece to dream on."

And with this she led the way out the door to a seat in the yard—her wash-bench, really—under the mulberries near the well.

She did not speak as she crossed the yard; neither did her strange guest. But when they were quite away, and she had motioned him to a seat, she said:

"Well, Solon, what is it?"

"What you reckon?" the man answered. "You don't reckon I 's jest on a pleasure-trip, does you? No, I come on business. I did n't git no invite—an' I did n't need

none. A man don't have to git invited to his own silver weddin'." There was a note of malice in the chuckle with which he threw this at her; but she took no heed of half-shades.

"Please to state yo' business, Solon—an' state it quick. What you want?"

"What you reckon I want?" He had removed his slouch hat now and was blandly fanning himself with it. As she did not hurry to answer again, he added:

"I want what 's comin' to me, dat 's all."

"What 's comin' to *you?*" The woman really did not understand.

"Dat 's what I said. I come for what 's comin' to me. Dey tol' me you an' Frank Stillwater was givin' a silver weddin' down heah, an' from what I see, peepin' in whilst de procession was movin', I jedge it 's true. An' ef it is, I reckon I 'm yo' pardner in de silver-weddin' business. I come for my half o' dat till, Mis' Stillwater."

"Oh!" This was not much to say, just "Oh!" It was little more than a gasp, but in it were intimidation—a futile flare of resentment spent even in the utterance—and surrender.

The man saw his advantage, and was quick to follow it up.

"Well, be quick, please!" he said; "I come a long ways. I don't want to make no scandalizemint. I only come for what 's comin' to me—like I said. Ef Frank Stillwater is calculatin' to claim a sheer in *my silver weddin'*—"

The woman waved him silent with her arm, topping his voice with hers:

"Frank ain't claimin' nothin' but his own. Hit 's only his wooden weddin' wid me. De silver is mine—"

"*Ours!*" interrupted the man of the slouch hat, and then he laughed mockingly. "An' so Frank is takin' out his five years in wood, is he? I fotched him a little wood

present myself—to give him in case he gimme trouble." He laid his hand upon his heavy walking-stick,—almost a club, it was,—and dropped it, chuckling again. "An' so you was keepin' my sheer o' de silver for me, Amity? Thank you kindly. An' now ef you 'll come wid me an' git it—"

Amity was an amiable creature, but Solon had gone just a little too far. As she rose, still obedient to his demand, she turned and glared at him.

"I see you ain't changed none," she said slowly; "hogs don't change."

And then motioning to him to walk before, she followed him across the moonlit yard back to the house.

"Wait," she began to say, but it was useless, as the man did not intend to let her get out of his sight. He followed her in.

Frank happened to be passing just as they entered, and Amity whispered to him, something which sounded like:

"Git de money-jar," and this was probably what it was, as it was precisely what he did, the habit of his life being to comply with his wife's demands without question.

When he had brought the jar of silver, Amity said something in his ear again, and the two men went together to the retirement of the wash-bench in the mulberry shade. A round moon sent white search-lights flitting between moving clouds across the yard, so that one could almost discern the colors of the marigolds and zinnias which bloomed along the way, bordering the front line of Amity's vegetable garden.

The woman stopped only a moment for a word with her guests and slipped away again to the mulberries. She had probably expected to find the men amiably dividing the silver, as Solon had had time enough to explain his demand; but they sat quietly apart, awaiting her coming. It had not even occurred to Frank who his strange

guest might be. If he had been forced to an opinion, he might have guessed from the call for the money-jar that it was somebody taking up a missionary collection, although the hour for such was late.

It was only when Amity said, "Well, Solon?" that Frank knew whom he had been entertaining.

There was power in the name, and it lifted him to his feet, seeing which, the larger man rose also—and faced him.

"He claims half o' dat money, Frank, 'caze he stood wid me at dat April-fool weddin' twenty-five years ago," Amity said, evenly, and then she added, "an' ef he 's needin' small change so much as to ride fifty miles for it, I reckon—"

But she did not finish. Frank did not give her a chance. He had placed the jar in her hands, pulled off his coat and rolled up his sleeves, before she realized what he meant.

"You hold dese stakes, Amity," he said, "tell we see who 's de bes' man. Hit won't be divided, but de bes' man takes de pot." And stepping stiffly, like a little game rooster bristling for the fray, he began backing until he stood in the middle of the open behind the wash-bench—on Amity's bleaching-grass plot—an ideal clearing for a fight. Every motion had been a challenge, and of course there was nothing else for Solon to do but to follow. The magnificence of the man's insolence as he languidly did so was like fuel to the fire of Frank's wrath.

He even had the audacity to remark while he took his stand and threw off his coat:

"Of co'se, ef you wants me to kill yer—"

The man was taller than Frank, twice his heft, and no doubt he expected to give him a good beating, take the jar, and go his way. But Frank felt differently about it. He was pretty sure, too.

If Solon was strong, his opponent was lithe and wiry. Felled by a blow which threatened to send him to Kingdom-come, he was back in a flash, fairly walking all over the person of the larger man, tangling himself in his arms and legs, tripping him so that he fell, and then, before he could regain footing, tripping him again, and yet again.

Over and over they went across the grass-plot, and beyond into the dusty yard where the hens cooled themselves—the strong man wasting himself in missent blows, rising and falling, and rising again—Frank astride his neck, pommeling his face with his heels, until he succeeded in slipping down behind him, bracing back his arms with both his little legs while he caught the standing man by one foot from behind and pulled him over to the ground again.

Here he made him eat the dust, literally, for while he held him face downward, there

was nothing for him to breathe but the fine poultry-flavored grit of the barn-yard.

They kept veering as they fought, ever in one direction, until they were almost up to the fig-tree where the chickens roosted, and a low scolding sound from the branches showed that things were rather ticklish there, since its recent devastation for the feast—only a few of the older and tougher citizens remaining.

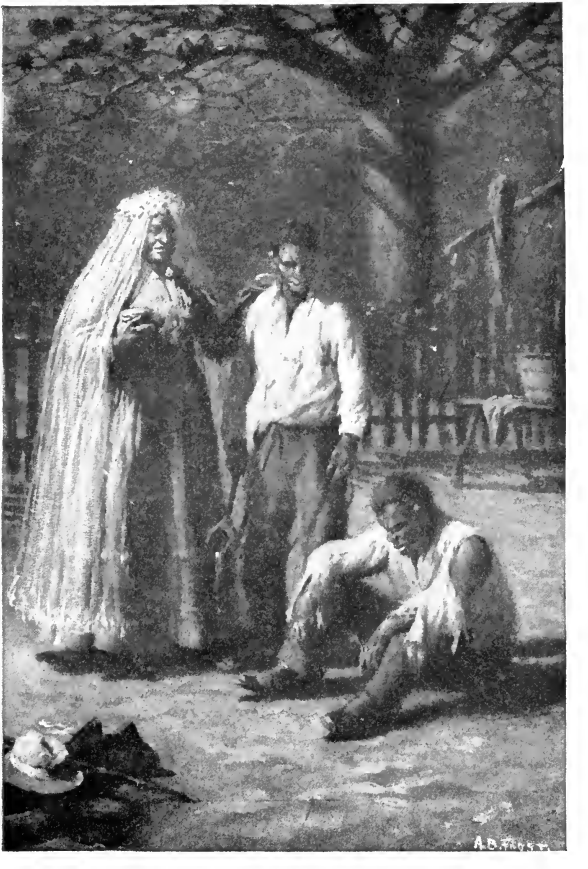
There were moments in this test of prowess and of skill when there seemed to be little doing in the dust-cloud, so close was the contest between agility and brute strength, and these were moments of anxiety for Amity, who had kept close all the time, even urging and coaxing the smaller man to "give it to 'im!" at intervals as she saw the need. She had agreed to "keep her hands off" before they began to fight, and only once did she break the spirit of her promise, even while she kept its letter.

Solon was a powerful fellow,—no mistaking that,—and once, after a long-drawn tussel in which Frank had worried him almost to the point of exhaustion, the man gave a sudden lurch and would have risen, turning Frank under, but for Amity. With a quick plunge, she planted herself upon Solon, and sat there; and Amity weighed two hundred and fifty, if she weighed a pound. Seeing that she had him, so that he could not help himself, flat, face downward, chest in the dust, arms and legs spread hopelessly, she said to Frank, with a nod toward the well-bucket:

"Tek a drink; I got 'im!"

And while the little man was away, she leaned over and hissed into the ear of the other: "You hog!"

But Solon could not answer. He could not even spit out the dust. And when Frank came back, running, and bade the woman get up, while he took her place, standing



"Is you satisfied?"

where she had sat and ready to be lifted for a fresh encounter, he suddenly realized how things were, and he said quickly in some alarm: "Better go fetch some water for him." When it was brought, together they lifted the man and made him drink, and it was the partner of his early wedding who wiped his face for him and helped him to a sitting posture, but the thing which she kept saying into his ear, albeit the tone was soft enough, was, "Hog! Hog!"

And when the man was revived, Frank said, "Is you satisfied?"

"Don't hurry me." The voice was that of the vanquished. "Go lead my horse in heah—an' lemme go. Ef I 'm once-t in de saddle—"

And so it was that when in a little while Amity went back to her friends, she made an excuse for Frank, who, she said, had "gone to drive a hog out o' de lot." Then she slipped in, and got her man a clean shirt

and a fresh pair of trousers, and went out and helped him bathe his face and hands at the well, in the screenery of the mulberries, where no one could see, and if the wakeful fowls had listened while she mopped his face, they might have heard endearing terms, quite different from that other word which she had kept repeating in their hearing to some one who, for all they could see from their perch, might have been the same man.

When they returned to the crowd, Amity briskly to the fore and Frank tripping along behind, a bit flurried, as is often the master cock after a barn-yard victory, the woman was in high glee and, springing forward, she seized the fiddle and put it into her man's hands while she caught up her flounces and danced down the center of the room, declaring that she "had n't had so much fun since she was a baby!"

It seemed a simple childish impulse of triumphant glee, but there was something so fine in it, so above the common in its reckless abandon, that the people moved back involuntarily, giving her the floor.

When she had taken a few turns, she threw her head over her shoulder and called to Frank, who had begun to tune up: "Hurry, man! Mek de fiddle talk!"

And, catching her fire, so he did. Eloquent beyond all previous record, the rustic strings fairly pitched forth dancing patterns into which the ponderous dancer fell and rose, swaying or tilting, as the magic of the fiddle compelled, as weightless, upon toes inspired, as the feathery fluffs of thistle which dance upon the breeze. Staccato high steps, slurring curves for languorous poses, sudden lapses when half-frenzied crowding of high notes threw her into hazardous poising in which she tipped to the danger-edge, when a peremptory scrape of

the rosined bow brought her up with a sudden turn, at which the crowd, breathless till now, burst into a storm of wild applause, and Frank, seeing the moment come, lifted his bow and called out:

"Tek yo' pardners for de weddin' march! Once-t roun' de outside o' de pines, twice-t roun' de gallery on de inside, den brek up in a Ferginia reel! *Tek yo' pardners!*"

"PETTY LARCENY"

"PETTY LARCENY"

PERHAPS it is rather startling—Petty Larceny—as a name for a girl. And yet, taken as we usually take names, with no idea of any special meaning, it is not half bad. Indeed, it is even good, which is to say, primarily, it has phonetic quality, is euphonious to a pleasing degree, and its first part, Petty, makes an attractive diminutive, rather suggestive of affection. On the plantation, where alone the name was known, Petty stood wholly as a term of endearment.

Petty was a fascinating maid of twenty or thereabouts,—"sort o' molasses-candy color an' sweeter yit," so one of her numer-

ous admirers once described her,—and it would n't have mattered much if her name had been Dolores Vobiscum, like that of one of her friends who lost her mind: she would instantly have become Dolly the adorable, and been just as captivating as now.

Her father, a stolid old negro known as King David, had served as janitor at the court-house in a remote county for several years in his early manhood; and during that time, as he went about his duties with no thought beyond the manual responsibilities of his office, certain bits of court vernacular fell from time to time unheeded into his ignoring mind, and simply lay there, like leaves in a dovecote, which either lie and rot or perchance sometime serve in the forming of a nest, for simple availability and fitness.

Old King David had always been a man of few words, and the unusualness of his

slender vocabulary, enriched in so exceptional a way, gave him an enviable reputation for wisdom in a community the highest tribute of which was paid to the incomprehensible.

For instance, when once in a quarrel with a neighbor whom he had accused of some offense, no matter what, he clenched his argument and won the lasting respect of a number of witnesses by exclaiming:

"What 's dat you say, nigger? Ef you talk like dat, I 'll prove a' alibi on you in de face o' Constitutional Jewish prudence."

No one knows certainly by what association the old man had connected the term "petit larceny" with his child, or that there was any special connection. It may have been only like the leaf blown into the dovecote, taken to serve. However, the writer is inclined to believe—from slight circumstantial evidence, which is often worse than no evidence at all—that in some mystical

way he had associated the name with the divinity whose statue, done in plaster, stood over the court-house door—her whom we all know, who stands ever blindfolded and bearing a pair of scales in her hand.

This may be an idle fancy, and yet, what else could he have meant when, one day, seeing Petty playing blindman's-buff with the other children when she was about twelve, he exclaimed, laughing:

"Now, ef somebody 'd loan'd Petty a pair o' weighin'-scales, she'd look perzac'ly like her own statute."

Be this as it may, he was more than satisfied with the name, as was every one else on the place. The mother, born and reared in the shadows of even sub-suburban life, on a plantation remote from the world of thought or suggestion, took it with artless delight not unmixed with pride, recognizing it as one of a noble family, the

acquaintance of which her lord had made in a broader life than hers.

Stealing was stealing on Sugar Bend plantation, and vigilance committees did n't trouble themselves much with terms. Of course, there had been occasional cases where culprits, taken in some offense, had been carried for trial to court, thirty miles away; but these were rare, and were generally for simple "American crimes," such as horse-stealing or fighting.

As she had merged into handsome womanhood, Petty's father made an effort to have her called Larceny, and for a time it seemed as if the more dignified name, shortened to Larcene, would carry the day; and so it might have done but for the girl's unfailing winsomeness, which made Petty or even "Pet for short" peculiarly fitting.

Petty wore gowns of yellow and red and pink, and she sewed ruffles of one color upon

another with long and careless stitches wherever about her flounce-loving person there seemed a place, and she was as pretty and straight as a yellow flag.

Going to the field, she always had a man with her, with gangs of malcontents within easy range, keeping her in sight; and until her twentieth year, when she finally made her choice, scarcely twice in succession was she seen with the same man.

She would have been surrounded, of course, but for plantation etiquette, which requires that one at a time shall have his chance with a maid, and while this opportunity lasts the rest must stand off.

Everybody knew that little yellow Phil, the fiddler, had loved her to despair all his life, and yet—perhaps because he had loved her humbly without hope for so long, and, too, partly because every able-bodied buck on the place was his confident rival—every one was surprised at her choice. Still,

many were glad, just out of kindly sympathy with the lesser man. For love of Petty, Phil had worn black-and-blue eyes at frequent intervals for years; had even carried his arm in a sling for her sake, a serious matter for a fiddler.

Phil always got whipped in every encounter in love's cause, and yet he never seemed to have any sense of fear, at least where Petty was concerned. At the ghost of an insinuation reflecting upon her, he would light into a six-footer with the fire and recklessness of a bantam rooster challenged by a cock of the walk.

It is probable that the little man was as much surprised as any one else when Petty finally accepted him. Certainly he acted quite as a man out of his mind, and when he was fiddling at a dance a few days after his engagement, he actually grew so nervous while he watched her take the "Cincinnati" step and then "mosey" down the center of the

room that he lost his time, and finally "broke down in a regular giggle," and had to begin all over again, to the hilarious delight of the older men and the mocking derision of his recent rivals.

"De princip'lest trouble wid a' ingaged fiddler," Phil chuckled as he played, "is dat he don't nuver git a chance sca'cely to dance wid 'is gal hisself; but he can worry her pardner an' make him come to any time he chooses." Saying which, he one time played so fast that Petty's fat partner "tumbled all over himself" and fell sprawling.

Phil had as little money as any young man in the county, and as slight financial prospects. A fiddler need never starve on a Southern plantation,—that is, if he fiddles well enough,—but neither may he grow rich.

True, he easily earns his three dollars a night, with an occasional five, while the laborer in the field is glad to get his dollar

a day; but the fiddler, as a rule, is in requisition only on Saturday nights at best, and so, unless he has some sub-trade, living comes hard.

Phil had no sub-trade. He was, as he was fond of boasting, "jes a nachel fiddlin' fiddler, f'om de ground up." Indeed, he so loved his art—there are arts the practice of which in certain conditions reduces them to trades—that he often said:

"Ef de Lord 'll on'y gimme a stiddy job at fiddlin' when I git to heaven, 'stid o' tacklin' a clumsy ole harp, I know I 'll soon be able to play for de angels to fly by." Indeed, with this thought in mind, he had even evolved out of his imaginative genius several racy compositions which, with onomatopoetic instinct, he called "flipflap wing-pieces," which were so suggestive that one, listening, might close his eyes and fancy himself floating away as in a dream of flying.

It is hard on a fellow to be engaged to be married and to have no money. It is hard even on a Southern plantation, where money counts for so little and most available things are virtually free—most, but not all.

Even while he enters this vestibule of Hymen's temple, no matter how remote and primitive the edifice, a man finds himself feeling for his pocket-book.

Engagement periods at the Bend were trinket-times and treating-times, and while the last was simply a matter of ginger-pop and persimmon beer, with a merry-go-round on a holiday, the trinket business was more serious. As to the ring, Phil was fortunate enough to have one on hand, an heirloom in which he took no little pride. First, —a fact which greatly distinguished it,— it was of pure gold, and it had been given by his father to his mother as a pledge of good faith and affection in lieu of the ceremony which a strained situation forbade.

Phil had often told the story as he showed the ring. It seems that, in their courting days, his parents had quarreled, and during a brief estrangement a clever rival had "married his daddy offhand," as Phil expressed it; whereupon she who was afterward his mother, instantly, and for all time, relented. It was too late then for a wedding, of course; but the mother was apparently not one to worry over trifles, as she is quoted as boasting that all her rival got was a "paper citi*fic*ate," and that so long as she had the man and the ring, she was satisfied.

As to the marriage certificate, she, after a while, remarked:

"She 's welcome to de paper one. Hit 's dead stock. I got mine, an' it 's *live prop'ty*—de spittin' image of its daddy; an' dat 's all de citi*fic*ate I wants."

This bit of character discovers to us a somewhat romantic vein in both parents

which it is well for us to remember if we would follow Phil's life with leniency and affection.

His father died while he was still a little chap, and his mother, after a few months of rank weeds and of wailing in the wilds of widowhood—a prerogative freely accorded her by popular sympathy, which declared her to be "de on'iest widder dat had a right to tote a weed"—suddenly darted into another romance with an ardor worthy of love's first kindling. The new "step-father-man" was decided in his antipathy to reminiscent children, and so, after a brief conflict between conjugal duty and parental love, the woman decided not to hazard her boy's welfare by taking him among strangers. She preferred to "loan him out" to friends who had known his people. So she did, and the boy had stayed "loaned out" all his days. She had probably foreseen that this would be the case,

as, in going, she had given him his father's ring,—and hers,—with the parting injunction to keep it all his life "to show dat he was honest-born."

Petty, of course, knew about the ring and that she would now become its proud owner by inheritance—and, indeed, this was the one thing in her marriage in which she felt confessed pride; and when at last she was able to pass her shapely hand around to let her friends see it,—put on with a wish, it could not be removed,—she would smilingly declare:

"Oh, yas, it 's de reel thing."

The design was the old favorite,—two hands clasped,—and Phil honestly regarded it as a mascot. He told Petty so, and that its motto was, "Whom I jine together let not man or woman put asunder." He knew that the one woman who had tried it once had gotten only "paper satisfaction."

So Phil had lived about in various homes

as he grew up, and once, for a brief period, even in the cabin where hung a certain hated document, deep in cotton plush and cheap gilding.

On his mother's departure, "the other woman" had made what he called "step-mammy motions" toward him, and would have taken him for good. He refused to go near her for a long time; but finally realizing that, after all, there was a sort of relationship which might, perhaps, as well be happily interpreted, or, possibly, only because he liked her picnic pies, he tried it—for less than a week.

It was said that he was actually sitting at her board and with his mouth so full of apple-pie that he got more coppery in the face than the provocation would have warranted when she unwittingly referred to his father as her beloved husband, whereupon Phil retorted hotly:

"Husban'! Don't you say husban' to me! Ef you do, I 'll smash up dat ole

paper citi*fic*ate, an' turn you back into a' ole maid, whar you b'longs."

Of course he could not remain after this. When he had related the incident to his friends, there were many who thought him very forbearing not to have destroyed the paper then and there, and he declared that he would have done so "ef she had n't 'a' been a lady and he in her house." And then he added: "Anyhow, I could n't 'a' had de heart to do it, bein' as it 's all she 's got."

Phil's peculiar orphanage and his exceptional aloneness had placed him on the welcome list in almost any home on the plantation. He was a fair kindling-splitter, a milker, and, in a dilettante way, a gardener, so that he could make good his "keep" without having often to draw upon an inadequate purse. Of course, too, the family with whom he stayed always had free music, morn, noon, and night.

Once or twice he had had to change his

quarters because of the conversion to religion of his host or hostess, who could not, of course, harbor the devil's instrument after having forsworn his majesty himself.

So he had changed his last home before going to live with old Aunt Cynthy Crow, with whom he was staying at the time of his engagement. Aunt Cynthy was a hopeless cripple from rheumatism, being unable so much as to rise from her chair; and when she heard that her friend Betty Bent, recently reclaimed from sin, had said that she had hated to send Phil away, but she could not seek God with her heart in the cabin while the devil kept tantalizing her feet, she chuckled in reply:

"I 'd be so tickled to git my ole daid foots into trouble, wid fiddle or devil or whatever, dat ef Phil 'll come an' wake 'em up for me, I 'll find 'im for his pains."

To "find him" was to board him, of course, and although Phil did not take this

generous offer more literally than it was meant, he made a very economical arrangement with the old woman, who was a pensioner on the bounty of her former master and was only too glad of the chance service of Phil's willing hands, as well as of the diversion of his music.

Never was happier combination than that of the lonely old cripple and the lightweight fiddler, Phil Phillips. Mirth and melody ever follow the rosined bow, and merriment, if it does not mock, is, the world over, a grateful antidote for pain.

The cabin, which for years had been a favorite resort for condoling decrepitude, became, through the cheerful invitation of the strings, love's trysting-place and a constant scene of gaiety and fun. Most of the mothers on the place were pleased to have it so, too, knowing the value, through its antithesis, of the resident chaperon. It was the anxious mother of several daugh-

ters who was heard to remark to God one night, as she knelt in prayer beside her bed:

"Yas, Lord, Sis' Cynthy is fiddle-proof herself, an' she 'll keep a stiddy watch on de chillen, an' 'stribute Scripcher to 'em 'twix' de fiddle-strings—in po'tions."

Perhaps old Cynthy was the only person on the place who was grieved that Phil was to be married, and for natural, if selfish, reasons. It saddened her inexpressibly to contemplate a return to the somber, pain-filled days, with only the questionable solace of her contemporaries.

Phil and Petty, having loved these many years,—Petty, it seems, suddenly discovered this to have been true of herself as well as of Phil,—were of one mind as to an early marriage, though the maid was a trifle coy on the subject, as will appear from her answer to her romantic lover when he begged that she promise to walk to church with him at the first robin's call.

"No, I ain't gwine do it, Phil. I ain't gwine to walk up de aisle till I kin wear a bunch o' sweet-pea blossoms."

Whereupon Phil, doubling with laughter, howled that it was "allus a close race 'twix' de robins an' de peas," and they held hands in the narrow path, refusing Indian file while they made the Indian tracks, one after another, and life was all a dream of bird-song and flower for them.

They agreed, however, that either bird-call or blossom might sound the wedding-bell: and that very night Phil set a trap for robins and put it, baited with crumbs, up on Aunt Cynthy's roof; and the girl thought it would n't hurt to sow peas in a box, even if they did n't sprout until the ground thawed out in the garden.

This was while the fields seemed as hard as flint in the black lands; and although there was a good while to wait, Phil began to feel as care-impressed as a real family

man when he realized the many demands for money that would come even in the fast-shortening interval. Yet, although he had scarce silver dimes enough to jingle in his pocket, he would have danced with joy any morning to discover a premature robin in his trap, and he always climbed and peeped, quite prepared for the lesser miracle in his realization of life's greatest.

And, too, if God noticed a sparrow, even for its own sake, why not make a robin to order for love's cause, if need be? As he thought of all the trials of the waiting season, he often longed for a hurried wedding, which would save a lot of trouble; and, once over—well, they could manage some way, money or no money, as others were doing daily.

But no pea sprouted and bloomed in a night, and the robin's song awaited its season, and, as the weather grew milder, dances were more sparse; and the little fiddler

began to wish, for the first time in his life, for "some sort o' workin' trade," and he looked askance at his beloved fiddle and said disputatious and disloyal things that a darky's fiddle could never answer in its legitimate vocabulary, which is made only of words of mirth and jollity.

So, pressed by present circumstances and a sense of future need, Phil bethought him of a few simple, odd ways of earning odd sums, and was able to put trifling amounts by, against the demands of the wedding.

For one thing,—and an eccentric thing it seemed on the surface,—he began to sell his chickens. He had always raised chickens on shares with the family with whom he stayed. It would seem that the chickens would have been more useful to him in his housekeeping than the small sums they might bring, but "things are not what they seem." A great line, that!

It was said that when Phil started to sell his chickens he never got done selling, and that the same was true of his potato-patch. It may not have been a fact that he robbed the potato-hills of the fields through which he passed on his peddling rounds, but there was no one who doubted that he sold chickens of breeds unknown to his own yard and Cynthy's.

This is a hard thing to say of a young man, and would even now be withheld by his partial chronicler but for the light of subsequent events. Circumstantial evidence, which is often of the devil and utterly misleading in itself, had yet some value in corroboration. Held in abeyance, it does occasionally help the cause of truth.

Phil was greatly excited when, one night, as he was on his way to see Petty, he met a man who had come all the way across Cockleburr Bayou to tell him that there

was a letter in the post-office for him. He was so nervous over it, having never before received a letter in his life, that he thought it best not to tell Petty, lest she, too, might share his dread of impending news.

Of course, he thought first of his mother, and from that a number of contingencies emerged. There had been ample time for the growth of "a whole step-family" since his parent's departure under conditions most favorable. He even had a fear that his mother might be coming back, and somehow he wondered if possibly she would wish to recover the ring, the only thing she had ever given him.

It was noon next day when the little fellow got back and, with the letter in his pocket, hurried to his lady-love.

He was grinning so when they met that he could not for the life of him get his lips together to call her name, and after several abortive efforts to say "Petty," which insis-

tently became "Fetty," he was obliged to compromise.

"H-h-honey," he gasped, from away down his throat, "what you reckon I got?"

"A robin?" laughed Petty.

This, for some reason, helped his articulation, so that he was able quite clearly to reply:

"Better 'n dat, Petty; better 'n dat!"

And when she frowned and coquettishly turned away, he added, while he seized both her hands:

"Listen at dis: I got a fifty-dollar job! Dat what I got! I got a letter—here it is—a letter f'om de president o' Pompton College down heah at Yaller Briar Wells, an' dey wants me to come an' fiddle for 'em at dey anniversal hops, every night o' de beginnin'—de *commencement,* I mean to say. What you got to say to *dat?* An' dey offer me fifty dollars cash down, in hand—good specious payment!"

The annual college commencement at the close of the spring term was the social event of several counties, and to play at one of the Pompton hops would be great honor for a resident of Sugar Bend. It was no wonder the little fiddler was fairly beside himself.

The only trying feature in it was his having to leave Petty for a short time; but this was easily borne, in view of their common advantage. It was bad to go, but the going was a great affair. Twenty-odd miles by road in his own little wagon, in which he carried his trunk and fiddle, and which he hoped to bring back loaded with housekeeping goods, was a journey needing considerable preparation; and so intimately was it associated with his romance that it was commonly spoken of on the place as "Phil's weddin' trip." To this, however, he laughingly objected: "Hit ain't to say a weddin' trip. Hit 's on'y jes

a little journey in search o' my marri'ge po'tion."

Under the influence of her emotional appeal, Petty was easily induced to stay with old Cynthy during Phil's absence, and it was even arranged that they should make their home with her, or that she should stay with them, turning her pension into the general housekeeping fund, when they should be married, Phil and the fiddle and young company, she declared, having "clair sp'iled her for lonesome livin'."

THE poor little college town to which Phil went to make his fortune was to his rural vision a great metropolis. From the time his delighted eyes had rested upon the great globes of color in the apothecary's window, and had taken in the papier-mâché grotto which appeared to supply the soda-fountain, he never experienced the least loss

of ardor in his admiration of city ways and magnificence.

Petty's special request as they parted had been for "a bureau wid a swingin' lookin'-glass in it, dat 'll gimme my hat one minute an' tip over an' scoop up my foots de next. Dat, an' a little hand-glass to glimpse my back hair, 'll make me b'lieve I 'm all but white." So she had said at the house and repeated at the stile to which she rode beside her lover as he went away.

He bought the bureau out of his first earnings, and had it moved to his room in the servants' quarters, and the little key, which fitted all the drawers alike, was soon swinging to his silver watch-chain, where it daily grew in importance, as gewgaws for the absent girl were constantly added to its charge.

Besides his regular fee, Phil made a few odd dollars for extra service. He was a

real genius with his fiddle, and was constantly in requisition.

With such inspiration always at hand, a dance was never out of place, if only there were dancers and available space. In the mornings on the broad verandas, under the trees at afternoon tea—any time when there were a half-dozen young people together—the fiddler would be invited to earn the price of some bit of tinsel or a gay ribbon for his lady.

His fiddling had made a great hit. Everybody was talking about it, even the old professors. "Why—why, that little nig—nigger!" said one of the portliest of these one evening as he mopped his purple face after a desperate race with death through the mazes of a Virginia reel. "Have n't d-d-done such a thing in f-f-f-forty years. Why, he 'd m-m-make a chair dance if it was n't dead wood."

It was inevitable that the familiar inter-

course involved in such an engagement as Phil's should lead him into temptation; that is, assuming that temptation and opportunity are, for some, virtually synonymous, as seems pitifully true.

Sweet soap was one of Phil's failings, and he liked to think of it in connection with Petty. It was easy to slip a cake into his pocket now and then as he passed the wash-stands, and to deposit it in the bureau; it was easy to do this many times, and to add a pretty silk handkerchief or a bottle of smelling-stuff, and, after a time, occasionally, even a trifling bit of jewelry. He always left the handsome articles undisturbed—watch-chains, which sometimes seemed fairly to tug at his sleeves, and jeweled rings, though he did once get off with a fine coat belonging to a fellow of about his own size.

These peculations were comparatively slight, and always effected in the face of

great opportunities, with both valuables and money in sight. There were always rolls of bills lying about with the pipes and tobacco—not great bills, in a little Southern college, but good green dollars, with an occasional V for affluent expression.

Phil selected the times when these were most in evidence, for refutation, to take the little things he dared; and consequently, although articles were often missed, it was a long time before he was even suspected. At last, however, one of the fellows set a trap—a fellow who had himself a fad for fine soap, and had lost several cakes, as well as a locket.

The trap was successful, and the result was really sad. It spoiled a whole evening for the boys, who had all grown fond of the little fiddler and had heard somewhat of his story. They knew he was to be married, and had even proposed to chip in to buy a little present for his wedding.

Sweet soap was one of Phil's failings

They did n't say anything to him that night, although every fellow counted his small belongings and put his money out of sight. Indeed, they did not speak of it at all, beyond the circle, though they expressed an intention of doing so the next day. Unfortunately, however, the thing got out, and one of the boys—one who had lost a shoe-buttoner or something—had him arrested.

There was probably never in any sore strait a more surprised and frightened young culprit than was poor Phil the day he was seized and taken to the court-house. He had never been in such a place before, and it was an awful experience.

There were several cases ahead of his when he got in, and he had time to sit and think.

The very imposing elevation of the judge's seat was disconcerting, and the impressive "your honor" with which he was addressed struck new terror through Phil's already

cringing soul. It was a judgment-day experience.

When, at last, his case was called and he stepped forward, his knees knocked together so that he came near falling. He had been guilty of things long ago at home, and had had dim but frightful visions of exposure and arrest, all somewhat like the present, but falling short of the real thing, which was, indeed, aggravated by contrast with his recent notable experiences. He had had a good time and had been well treated, and he was not a bad fellow at heart.

The black giant, the sheriff's deputy who had arrested him, and who even now towered beside him, had told him frankly that he had been "ketched stealin'," and so he realized dimly, or thought he did, what was before him. He knew precisely where each stolen article lay hidden, and he realized that the little key hanging plainly on his fob, and which had been so satisfactory an accom-

plice, would easily "turn State's evidence" and go far to convict him if it were brought into the case; but he was glad to remember that none of what he called the "joolry pieces" were in the bureau. Fearing that it might be opened during his frequent absences, he had kept the small incriminating things taken especially for Petty, prudently, or imprudently, about his person.

So, while he awaited his turn, he had thought fast, and it had soon seemed best to deny everything and then to offer his key, trusting to explain away such trifles as would be found.

A man had a right to suppose that gentlemen would n't take account of trifles such as these, but if they really wanted them he would insist upon returning them. It is true, there was the coat; but it was not in the bureau. It hung behind a door in a closet, and, unless it had been missed, would not be found. Or, if it came to the worst,

even the coat might be disposed of by a judicious game of bluff. How easy to gather up two coats instead of one in a hurry, and how possible unconsciously to take both home on one's arm, on a warm night when the overcoat was superfluous!

The situation had its weak points, certainly, but it might have been worse.

Indeed, there were many features in it which appeared providential, and the little man in his extremity even had the effrontery to thank God, as he stood there, that he had been given foresight to keep the jewelry out of the bureau.

He thought that he had the case fairly well in hand while he waited, and that in assuming the lofty height of injured innocence he might yet walk out a free man.

But there was something in the atmosphere of the place which sickened him and made his head swim, and the longer he stood and waited, the sicker he felt, so that

when, out of the stillness following the peremptory gavel, he heard his own name called, "Phil Phillips!" in a tone which sounded sepulchral and far away, he turned gray and then even green where the blue fright showed through the yellow of his skin, around his mouth and nostrils, and about the edges of his hair.

Still, he had life enough to know that he must answer, and inexperience enough to reply, in a vibrant metallic voice:

"Yas, sir, yo' 'oner'ble 'onor, dat 's me."

The judge, a benignant old man, turned a smiling face upon the little fellow as, with a twinkle in his eye, he replied:

"Yes, I see you are there."

Then, turning to the officer beside the prisoner, he asked:

"Who has been getting this young man into trouble? He got me into trouble last night. So stiff this morning I can hardly walk. What is the charge?"

"Petit larceny." The reply, prompt and clear at Phil's side, rang through the court-room.

A bombshell exploding in his soul could hardly have transformed Phil as did this artless reply.

He was no longer a poor prisoner begging for mercy. Judge nor bench nor ceremonial had place in his consciousness now. He was instantly himself again—Petty's lover provoked to wrath, the fighting bantam of Sugar Bend.

He did not hesitate. For a second the great six-footer beside him did not know what had hit him. So sudden was the plunge that it seemed as if the entire little man, all in a tense tangle, had landed in his face; and then, tooth and nail, as a catamount grasps and tears, so he tore right and left. Before any one had time to realize what was doing, or to interfere, the two were rolling on the floor together,

and there was blood in sight and fur flying.

When, after several minutes of this fierce tussle, the greater man was at last able to hold his antagonist at arm's-length and several others helped to get him away, it was necessary for the officer to carry his bruised and bleeding visage out for repairs.

All this took several minutes, and when the small man was next observed he was wiping the puffy mass which ought to have been a face and trying to button the fragment of a coat so that it would cover his shoulders.

Seeing that the big man had gone, and that the court was coming again into something like order, he turned up to the judge the single eye that seemed to remain,—the other being quite lost to sight in a fine protective swelling,—and, bowing respectfully, he said:

"'Scuse me, please, sir, yo' 'oner'ble 'onor, but I was 'bleeged to whup him."

This brought down the house, of course. Even the judge shook with laughter at the pluck of him.

"Dey 's some things no gen'leman won't stand," he went on. "An, now, ef deze gen'lemen 'll leggo my arms, dey 'll see I kin practise manners an' behavior—when I ain't insulted."

"What do you mean by insult, you—you little game-cock, you?" The judge spoke with an effort at severity, but with a weakening of his voice. Still, the dignity of the court was at stake. "I wish you to know that the officer was only doing his duty, and you shall pay for this, sir."

"I 'll pay whatever you say, yo' 'oner'ble 'onor, *ef I kin.* I know de man done his juty when he fotched me heah, an' I walked beside him peaceable. But ef you don't know what he done to insult me, sir, *I* knows it, an' *he* knows it—an' I don't think he 's likely to do it ag'in. I 'm heah to stan' for my

own actions, an' I don't want nobody else tangled up wid it. Dey ain't no ladies mixed up in dis case, an' ef anybody fetches 'em in, dey 's *boun' to be blood!* Dis is been a fair man-to-man fight, an' ef you 'll please, sir, pass it over an' tek up de case de way it stood befo' my trouble, I 'll answer fair an' square. De man dat 's jes stepped out a minute, he tol' me dat I was accused o' pickin' up some little odds an' ends, I b'lieve; an' ef dat 's so, I 'm heah to answer."

At this, amid the cheers of the crowd, always ready to espouse the cause of the plucky under dog, the judge cleared his throat and, calling for order, resumed the case in due form.

"I 'll be jiggered if I won't do it for you," he said, looking down at the prisoner while he called for the plaintiff.

In answer, a young man came forward smiling, and as he looked down into the

one tiny peep-hole that answered for an eye, but which held all that was needed of inquiry and intelligence, and then at the benign visage of the judge, he said, with unfeigned apology:

"The fact is, your honor, a number of the fellows have been missing little things, —all trifles,—and finally some one took a shoe-buttoner off my bureau, and—well, a day or so ago I missed a locket with my girl's picture in it. I thought I would n't mention this, but, really, now that the thing 's out, I 'd like to say that if he 'll give me the picture, he can have the buttoner, and any old thing he has besides; that is, of course, *if* he has it—and there seems to be no one else, and we found out he was taking things. He bit on a bait, you see, and so we 've caught him."

Turning now to Phil, he added:

"You hear what I say? If you just give me back the locket with the picture in it,

I 'll let you go—so far as I am concerned."

This was informal, but the law gangs an easy gait at such centers of justice as Yellow Briar Wells. Just exactly this innovation had not occurred before, probably, yet that there was nothing unusual in the spirit of it was evinced by the quiet way in which it was received.

When the young man had done, the judge regarded the prisoner with kindly inquiry over his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Well, you have heard the charge," he said evenly. "What do you say, prisoner?"

Phil hesitated. The truth was, he was in momentary terror lest the man who had gone out should return. He felt that he evidently knew something about Petty, but how much Phil could not even surmise.

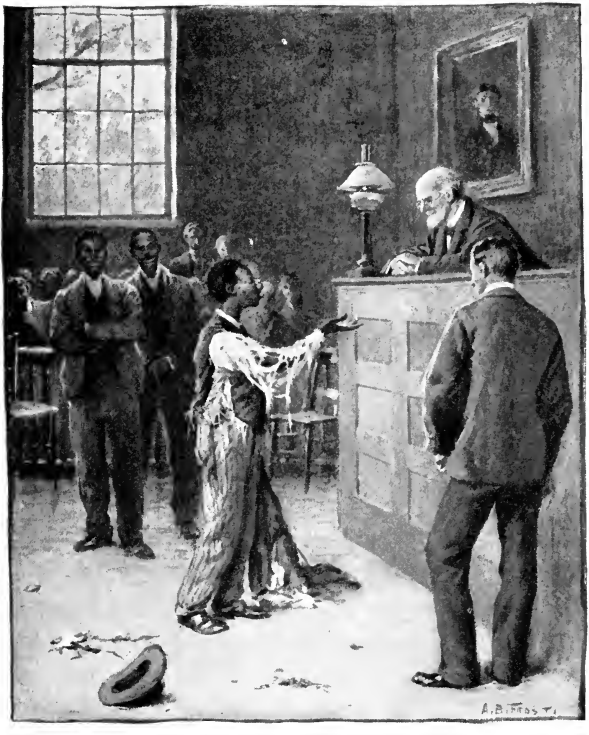
The locket, with Phil's own tintype replacing the girl's picture (which had gone up in smoke and been forgotten), was by this time probably in Petty's possession,

for it had been sent to her by mail on the same day it was missed. The man could scarcely know of this; and yet, what is more dangerous than the witness who "knows something"? In the interrogation point lies an endless tragedy of doubt.

After about a half-minute's silence—it seemed much more—Phil turned his face up to the judge. He had made several peculiar motions with his arms, as if vainly struggling to gesticulate, or he was perhaps threatened with a fit. And now he gasped:

"Would you please, sir, yo' 'oner'ble 'onor, let one o' de co't gyards come an' pull off my coat? I 'd tek it off myse'f, but I got a sort o' crick down de spine o' my back. I allus hates to whup a big man."

When two grinning black fellows had gotten the fragmentary garment off, with many an ejaculatory protest of pain from the wearer, Phil ran his finger along the armhole lining and presently brought out a



"Heah 's a few little trinkers I picked up heah an' dar, but I ain't got no locket, jedge"

small scarf-pin; then, from farther along, a collar-button and a pocket-comb.

As he held them up toward the judge, his shirt-sleeve, riddled to the elbow, fell away, leaving his thin arm bare.

"Heah 's a few little trinkers I picked up heah an' dar, but I ain't got no locket, jedge. I wush to Gord I did have it. Of co'se I don't reckon I ought to took deze, but ef you 'll look at 'em you 'll see dey ain't gold or diamonds. I did pick up a watch dat I seen layin' roun' loose beggin' to be stole one night, but I took it home, an' foun' out it was pyore gol',"—a lie, this,—"an' so I brung it back de nex' mornin'. I don't want nobody's riches. I 's jes a plain man. But de fact is, I was riz up right in de midst o' sech gran' gen-'lemen,—jedges an' lawyers an' juries—an' *jedges*, you know, jedge,—an' I been used to jes helpin' myse'f to any little left-overs; an' ef I would n't pick 'em up, dey 'd give

'em to me. I knowed deze heah quality-college yo'ng men did n't keer nothin' about such little trinkers as deze, an' I was 'feard dey mought forgit to give 'em to me,—dey all so took up wid dey valedictrums—an'—an' de yo'ng ladies,—an' so I jes gethered 'em up an' hid 'em whar nobody could n't find 'em, tell I could git a chance to ax for 'em. But, of co'se, ef dey wants 'em, heah dey is."

He turned and bravely looked around the court-room and up along the galleries.

"That 's my scarf-pin. Pass it along," came from a voice in the back row.

"Yes, and my cuff-buttons," said another. And now, first a single voice and then two and three together cried:

"Where 's my soap?"

"My soap?"

"And *mine?*"

"And *my* soap?"

"And my shaving-brush?"

"And *my* soap?"

At this the bruised mass which did duty as a face took on a pitiful grin while its owner giggled:

"Lord have mussy! *Soap!* Who 'd 'a' thought it? An' quality gen'lemen at dat!" Then to the judge: "Maybe I is gethered a few cakes o' soap, yo' 'oner'ble 'onor, f'om night to night—an' I 'll 'splain out how I come to do it, an' ef dey wants 'em back, all right. You see, hit 's purty hot, fiddlin' in de rooms, an' my hand hit sweats, an' dat 's bad medicine for bofe bow an' strings, an' so I 'd slip out once-t in a while an' wash my hands; an', of co'se, arter I uses a gen'leman's soap, I got too much respec' for 'im to leave it for 'im to sile his hands wid. But, as I say, hit 's all whar dey kin git it. Is dey anything else de gen'lemen done missed?" He had turned and was facing the gallery again. It was a great bluff. Indeed, his knees were hardly

strong enough for it, for they quaked pitifully while he bravely faced the audience. He was thinking of the coat and trusting to luck, which seemed to be with him, that it had not been missed.

"How about that locket?" The judge leaned over the railing and eyed him with telling scrutiny as he put the question.

"Dis heah 's a confession, jedge, yo' 'oner'ble 'onor. Hit ain't no denial. Nobody did n't ax me about dem little things I jes passed in. I say I ain't got no locket or no lady's picture. I nuver gits mixed up wid de ladies, nohow, an' ef I was to see a lady's po'trait settin' on a pianner, for ninstance, I would n't dast to no mo' 'n s'lute it as I passed by. But ef dat 's all, won't you please, sir, pass my sentence, please, sir, yo' 'oner'ble 'onor, an' for Gord's sake, mek it light, or tu'n me loose, one. S'posin' you take de vote, jedge, 'mongst deze gen'lemen, an' ef dey wants

me seized an' sol' for debt—*or whatever*—let 'em sesso."

The judge assumed a look of mock solemnity as he glanced about the court.

"Let 'im go," laughed a voice in the gallery.

"Turn 'im loose, judge," said another.

"Keep my soap to wash your conscience with."

"And mine, too."

"No, you can bring back mine. It 's green, and smells like violets," cried a changing voice in the front row, at which there was laughter.

"Oh, but let 'im off, judge; he 's sick," the boy continued.

"I keep thinking about that locket," pursued the judge, this time addressing the owner of the missing article.

"Well," he replied, "if he has n't got it, he has n't, that 's all; and I don't believe he has. It 's possible that a fellow I know

has it. Let him go, judge. I withdraw the complaint."

"Well," the old justice straightened himself until he seemed to Phil, standing below him, a mile high—"well, that 's all very well, so far as the charge is concerned, but I have a little business with the prisoner on my own account. My court is not exactly a place for free fights, and so I fine you, sir, twenty-five dollars, or imprisonment for ten days, whichever you say."

"Well, of co'se, I 'll take de twenty-five dollars, ef you please, sir."

"You don't take it—you pay it, you idiot!"

"Pay what, for Gord's sake? Pay twenty-five dollars? Why, jedge, I ain't got but three comin' to me, an' I got to go home. I can't pay what I ain't got. But—but—" a light came into his manner—his face was a closed book—"I tell yer what

I 'll do: I 'll *play* it out for yer. I 'll fiddle for yer tell I draps, howsomever, whensomever, wharsomever you say, sir."

This brought down the house.

In the midst of the laughter, the judge took out his watch.

"It 's dinner-time, boys, and I 'm hungry," he said, rising. "I 'm going over to the hotel, and you fetch him along and give him his fiddle—"

He turned to Phil.

"And when I 've got enough music I 'll say go, and when I say go, *you git!* Do you hear? Light out o' this town by the first train. D' you hear, I say?"

"Yas, sir; oh, thanky, sir, yo' 'oner'ble 'onor, thanky."

It was long past midnight when the little fiddler mounted the seat of his wagon and started on his homeward drive, the bureau, with its treasures untouched, lying face

downward in the wagon-bed behind him, its glass resting upon a pile of hay.

He started in his rags, and drove pretty fast until he reached a barn a few miles out, where he found entertainment for himself and beast, and where he slept the sleep of the vanquished and the weary.

Taking the journey by easy stages, doing a little cautious peddling in the twilights en route,—robbing Peter to pay poor Paul,—he was three whole days on the way, and they were days of needed healing and recuperation, too.

His face had not been quite normal when he left home, so its battered state would prove less startling than it might have been. It would be accepted as a matter of course. His friends were used to it.

Indeed, the days of hiding in which he slept whenever his way led across a clearing, and the nights of easy travel, interspersed with snatches of rest, all supple-

He was three whole days on the way

menting a fortnight of ease and high living, brought him out so wonderfully that when he drove into the plantation gate, late the third night, the jubilant song with which he announced his return was but a spontaneous expression of his own exuberance.

Petty met him at the stile where he had left her—where, indeed, she had waited for two nights.

"Well, heah I is, Sugar-pie, bureau an' all," he chuckled as, leaning down, he drew her up beside him.

"An' you sho looks fine—an' feels slick. Sto' clo'es shows out, even in de moonlight." She was passing her hand along his sleeve, her left hand over his left sleeve—on her left, his position making this come natural.

"Yas," he replied; "dis coat purty nigh broke me, dat 's a fac'. Hit takes fine feathers to mate wid a fine bird. But wait tell you see what I got for my sweetness in

de bureau back in de wagon. I tell yer I got yo' trousseau, so dat when you turns out you 'll wake up de plantation."

"I bet you spent all you made. How much money is you brung home, anyhow?"

"Not much, *to* be sho; but you know hit takes money to live like a gen'leman, an' I knowed you would n't want me to—"

"Of co'se not. I wants you to stand wid de best. So you got de bureau, is you —wid a tip-over merror?"

"Yas, an' dat ain't all. What 's de matter wid me, forgittin' de princip'lest thing I brung you! Look heah, gal."

As he spoke, he leaned forward, lifted a small basket from under the seat, and laid it upon her lap.

"Heah 's you' robin-bird, Sugar. Found 'im waitin' in de woods, huntin' for me. What you say to dat?"

In leaning over, his face had brushed a bunch of flowers upon her shoulder.

"Bless goodness! *Sweet peas!* Well, I 'll be doggoned!" he chuckled. "How long 'll it take to make de weddin' cakes?"

"Aunt Cynthy ain't done nothin' but whup up cake-batter on 'er lap ever sence de peas begin to bud, a week ago Sunday. Dey all ready. But you better turn dis robin loose. He 's all but smothered."

"Yas, I reckon he is—an' I 'spec' he 's got *his* pardner back yonder in de woods, too, an' I knows how he feels. But he 'll know de way back."

As she lifted the lid, the bird rose and, with a great cry, darted backward into the night.

THE HAIR OF THE DOG

THE HAIR OF THE DOG

LEVIATHAN, commonly known on the plantation as Levi, was nine years old, yellow as to color, wide-eyed and wise —yes, wise, although he had to spell the hard words in his First Reader lesson— for Levi "saw things" denied to the vision of ordinary mortals.

This seems like cramming description a little, perhaps, and, after all, it is scarcely adequate in presenting the boy's picture.

There was something weird about the lad —an "other world" look, one would almost say, such as that which distinguishes the blue-white face of the babe who is yet on the danger side of his two-year-old teeth,

from him who has passed over. His head was a little too heavy for his slim neck; his wistful eyes too big for his wizened face. His yellow skin bore a perennial crop of irregular freckles which matched his foxy hair in hue, adding a touch of comedy to an otherwise tragically serious visage—tragically serious, that is, when it was in repose.

Levi tended the fires and assisted in waiting at the table of the great-house, which is to say he straggled in laden with kindling-wood behind Pluto, the portly dignitary who was responsible for the fires—and at meal-times he wielded the fly-fan in season or fetched in relays of hot waffles from the kitchen, taking for this service the whispered orders of Marigold, the fat waitress upon whose stalwart shoulders the dignity of the dining-room safely rested.

And, just because he was so slim and inadequate—"so peaked and puny" his kins-

The butler

woman, the cook, had it—and because, of all the piccaninnies on the place, he had least of that elusive quality called "presence," the mirthful mistress of the manse generally referred to him as "the butler," thus, with one swift stroke, converting the ultra-serious lad into a cheerful grotesque.

As a fact, Levi was nothing if not both serious and gleeful—nothing if not picturesque, as he sidled about the dining-room, his serio-comic expression always bearing a palpable relation to a grin. And yet, although he seemed ever trying not to laugh or getting over a giggling spell, the reversion in repose was always to the weird look of one who "sees things."

The boy's toilets may have conduced somewhat to grotesqueness of effect, too, as the one thing distinguishing about them was that they were always misfits, eclectic in character, and never by any chance new.

From long to short trousers and back

again, in and out of suspenders by way of twine or buttons, or even an occasional safety-pin, he passed with the same engaging naïveté that distinguished his promiscuous use or disuse of shoes, or the mating of pairs apparently predestined to estrangement, as a lax congress gaiter with the remains of a red-topped boot, or even, as on one occasion, one of his mistress's discarded boudoir slippers of blue suède mated with a rubber overshoe, the latter doing double duty in supplementing the deficiency of a footless sock and the connection made good by the service of an old necktie of plaid fastened in an impressive bow-knot over the depression which marked the instep.

After becoming accustomed to Levi in his motley livery, one soon came to feel it to be an essential feature of his personality and would scarcely have liked to see him in conventional store clothes.

As he was, a variegated wizened little

composite, it was easy to accord him any occult sense to which he might lay claim, and so, when he stood apart from the other children and boasted of his "speritual visiom," it seemed that he might be telling the truth.

" 'Co'se I sees sperits," he would declare, looking far afield as he spoke. "I sees 'em —an' I hears 'em. Dey calls me, caze I was *borned wid a call!*" If he took his *caul* easily, phonetically, to suit himself, what was the difference? Some of the early prophets could not write their names, and Joshua knew no better than to "command the sun to stand still."

Levi's favorite and personal ghost seems to have been a tall, headless apparition whom he frequently met in lonely places after nightfall—at the wood-pile beyond the cherokee hedge; in the cow-lot, when milking was done; or anywhere along the winding length of "pecan lane" which led

by devious ways to the quarters—so that, when duty required him to go out alone after sundown, he had more than once been known to shirk.

His particular spook he always consistently described as a "tall, no-haid man" who suddenly confronted him, always nodding or bowing low with his headless shoulders —not a cheerful figure for any of us to meet along life's shadowy byways, to be sure.

It is accounted unfortunate for the very young and inexperienced to find themselves too often heard, and so it proved in the case of Levi, the butler. A man who sees one ghost may be accredited with seeing a dozen, and it was a matter of easy fluency for the imaginative boy to add pictorial features to stories which might so obviously grow without limit excepting that which credence allows. And so, sometimes, when the lad seemed to be gaining too much headway

in extravagant recital, Charity, the cook, would call out from her kitchen window:

"Quit yo' lyin', Levi!" To which the boy always opposed a ready denial:

"I ain't lyin', Aun' Charity! I on'y wusht I *was* lyin'. I 'd be sleepin' better! I knows what I sees, an' I 'd be lyin' ef I 'd deny it!"

Rather a clever defense for a nine-year-old piccaninny, and it had its effect, too, even upon the mind of his ever alert kinswoman, who scarcely knew sometimes whether the deep-set eyes of her young nephew might not really be "seeing things," after all.

And so the habit grew and Levi was threatened with unsavory distinction in more ways than one. Light speech is said to lead to light fingers, and the boy who saw large objects suddenly appear was soon gaining a reputation for making small ones as mysteriously disappear, as if by a sort of magic.

He had only to pass through a room without stopping and the cake of pink marbelized sweet soap which had lain plainly in sight would be there no more, and the same happened to alluring sweets carelessly left to the dangers of his swift passages through the house and, even more particularly, to trifling coins. And, as has been known before, the boy who would never fail to fetch in to his mistress the pocket-book which she had let fall or the bit of jewelry—or even a dollar bill—could outrank the professional prestidigitator in causing to disappear such attractive trinkets as it never seemed worth while to pursue beyond a first inquiry.

Strange to say, the boy was never detected in theft, never exactly taken red-handed—and, indeed, it must be said that nobody really wished to convict him and the family habit was rather to hope that he had n't been guilty of the obvious thing, after all. But

Light fingers

the mistress was watching. She did care for her servants and she was keenly sensitive to unusual dangers to the boy through his temperament; and so she began to set her mind to the treatment of a weakness before it should crystallize into character. Naturally, her first essays were through moral suasion. By every art she knew, she tried to induce him to confess his fault. It is not so culpable a thing to see ghosts as it is to steal soap, and, as confession of the lesser failing would involve the smaller sacrifice of pride, she applied her zeal to this, but accusation or even suspicion served only to emphasize the boy's denials.

Looking straight into her face, he would exclaim:

"Cert'n'y I sees sperits, Missy! I would n't dast to brag about ghos'es I did n't see. If I did, dey 'd ha'nt me, sho!" And throwing his gaze afar, he one time added:

"Yas 'm, I sees 'em—*an' I smells 'em, too!*"

This was carrying the thing a little too far and the mistress laughed outright.

"Hush, Levi!" she cried, "don't be ridiculous! The idea of smelling spirits! Whoever put such an idea into your head?"

At this, the boy came a step nearer to her and lowered his voice, and there was that in his earnestness which almost carried conviction—of his sincerity, at least—as he said:

"Ever sense I kilt my twin, Missy, I been smellin' sperits. Yas 'm. We was bofe babies, layin' on mammy's patchwork on de grass, asleep beside mammy's wash-tubs, an' she say I must o' been ridin' some sort o' nightmare in my dream, an' 'lowed I had my foots in de stirrup, an' I kicked my twin in de belly—an' kilt 'im, daid—an' dat 's huccome I smells sperits, special when I walks barefeeted in wet grass in clover-time

in de dark o' de moon. Yas 'm, I sees sperits, an' I sho smells 'em, too. I wusht to Gord I did n't."

On inquiry, it proved to be only too true that Levi's twin brother had come to an untimely end in precisely this accident, and moreover, shame to tell, their half-savage mother had brutally taunted the survivor with it. Indeed, it had been her daily habit, in the free use of the rod in his strenuous upbringing, to add a few blows in memory of this far-away crime.

"An' take dis—an' dis—an' dis!" she would shriek, "you yo'ng monster, for killin' yo' little angel twin—*an' dis—AN' DIS!*" So, beating a sort of crescendic measure, would she finally cool her ire.

But the mother had, several years before this telling, gone to her reward, and Leviathan, the small, the uncanny, the persecuted, had come into a life of greater freedom and opportunity at the great-house.

His aunt, Charity the cook, a broad, humane, tub-shaped woman of maternal quality and practical mind, had accepted the charge resignedly upon the death of her sister and, providentially, by the same bereavement through which she lamented that Levi had "fallen to her to raise," the mistress felt that he had also "fallen to her" to train.

Thus it was that in her desire to establish personal relations with the child, she began early to make a small allowance to him for services even so nominal as filling the cook's chip-basket and keeping the dogs out of the kitchen or, rather, constantly driving them out.

That her care did not extend to regulation of his toilet was partly an expression of the laxity of the time and place in such matters, and partly through a fine sense of the pictorial in life. There was scarcely a week when her kodak did not hold one or

Filling the cook's chip-basket

two films consecrate to Levi, the butler, in some novel effect of a fresh combination. But beyond a general insistence upon cleanliness with a strict rule of three-times-a-day for the roller-towel and the Saturday night tubbing, she preferred not to go.

She hoped to instill the saving principle that here, as in higher life, the class-line might almost be said to be drawn with soap, and that the small butler took readily to this potent factor in the higher civilization is well attested in his weakness for high-class soap. So is sometimes a lofty aim perverted.

The little lady of the manse, a dainty creature who appeared to take life easily and not to wrinkle her fair brow with vexed problems of conduct, had yet evolved a few fundamental principles from her fluffy round head which was much steadier than some of its piquant coiffures would have led one to suspect. She had always encouraged

the boy to save his wages. She made him keep clean and she hoped in time to make him honest. She would have preferred to begin with honesty, but abstractions may not be doled out as rations.

She had taught him a little catechism, and as he had twice been through the First Reader in the plantation school, she easily helped him to memorize certain brief portions of scripture, and in this, he proved unusually apt.

Much of the Sermon on the Mount he could repeat glibly enough, and he was never so happy as when holding forth in copious quotation, to any chance audience, in the stilted preaching voice of the plantation. One rounded period after another would fall from his lips so that many of the other plantation children soon had much of it, corrupted somewhat in transmission, at their tongue's ends.

As illustrating his ready wit, on one occa-

sion when his mistress had reproved him for lying, the little fellow set his face quizzically while he replied:

"No, ma'am! I ain't lyin'. I does see ghos'es—an' dat ain't all. When I gits good an' pyore in heart, I *looks to see Gord!* An' I got scripture for it, too!"

What could she say—she who had taken such delight in drumming into his mind, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"?

Instead of answering in kind, she thought best to look at her watch and to remark that it was time to be splitting kindling for the evening fires, and for a long while after this she found herself avoiding the subject, so that the boy, left more to himself and his imagination, gathered fresh zeal. His wonder-tales grew in color and in fire until it seemed important that something should be done, and soon, for the child. He was manifestly in danger of becoming either a

confirmed liar or a defenseless victim to superstition, it was hard to tell which.

While she was casting about in her mind for some new plan of treatment, the mistress happened one day to be sitting behind the vines at her window when she suddenly discerned Levi's preaching voice below her in the garden. Rising, she peeped cautiously down to discover him mounted upon one of the wrought-iron benches in the honeysuckle arbor and while about a dozen piccaninnies stood wonder-struck and gaping before him, he gesticulated wildly while he described the mysterious headless man who came and went, never leaving any footprints in his path.

"Right onder de slim yaller half moon he stood, an' whilst I was lookin', Rover run right th'ough 'im—an' de cat, she run th'ough 'im—an' dey nuver fazed 'im! An' den he started to git taller an' taller—an' taller—tel he was *high as dis!*" He stood

on tiptoe, and at this, he threw up his hands, indicating a figure almost as high as the house. "An' drekly he seen me, an' he—"

"How could he see you, *widout eyes?*" It was a daring voice which objected.

"Ghos'es don't haf to have eyes—or noses—or nothin'! Dey jes has de sperityal *power!* Dey leaves dey heads in de graves so 's to know whar to go back an' lay down ag'in. An' den ag'in, once-t in a while, jes de heads rises out o' de graves an' floats aroun' in de dark, same as a jack-o'-lantern. But I don't want no mo' quizzifyin' talk. I like to know who 's noratin' dis sermon, me or you?"

"You is, of co'se," leniently agreed the objector. "Go ahead an' talk. When he bowed, like you say, wid 's no-haid shoulders, what did he say?"

"'What did he say?' Who say 'say'? He nuver said nothin'—jes bowed back an' fo'th—an' vanige into smoke. Ef he 'd spoke,

I 'd look to die, sho. Bless Gord, de no-haid ghos' ain't nuver spoke—not yit. Time he speaks, I 'll look to pass on—an' perpare for jedgmint!"

Here was an idea.

Preparation for judgment means contrition—repentance—and if a speaking ghost could bring about this happy issue—

The mistress withdrew from the window and, dropping in an attitude of meditation upon her *canapé*, she drew some pillows up against her body—then rose and lit several of the Japanese punk-sticks and stuck them in a vase beside the couch—resumed her place among the pillows—drew the afghan up over her slippers—threw up her arms and folded them beneath her head—and then chuckled at her own deliberate preparation for thought.

"Somehow, I can think and plan better when I know the mosquito-sticks are smoking," she laughed. "I believe there 's some-

thing in the queer smell of the things—a sort of inspirational incense odor."

And while she watched the narrow eccentric columns of blue as they threw diaphanous bow-knots and calla lilies into the air —and conch-shells of diminishing spirals— her face grew pensive and then suddenly gay.

"I 've got it!" she cried, "I 've got it! If a speaking ghost is the medicine he needs —dear me, what fun! Archie will be perfectly delighted!"

And reaching over, she hastened to touch the silver call-bell upon her dressing-table.

"Thank you, butler," she said playfully as Levi promptly answered the summons. "Step up-stairs, please, and say to Mr. Archie that I wish to see him," and as the boy disappeared, she called after him, "Right away, please," for she was a person of swift impulse.

Archie, her nephew, was a young college fellow, home on a vacation for the holidays,

and, as she anticipated, he was only too pleased to undertake to impersonate Levi's ghost.

By connivance of a ten-foot "pope's head" dust-brush, a small green lantern fixed within its hair and no end of gauzy windings, there stalked in the garden among the shrubberies that same night, in the dark hour before moonrise, such a spook as few of us would care to meet on a lonely road.

The mistress had taken the older servants into her confidence. Marigold, being adjudged unsafe, was sent away on an errand.

The man of the house, a quiet, acquiescent sort of person, who cared more for his old library than for the cane fields which were his ostensible first interest, had been informed of the plot and invited out to witness the play.

Taking the chair set for him in the screenery of the vines, he dropped his cigar and, laying his hand indulgently over his

wife's arm, as she stood beside him, he said:

"A tempting little escapade, this, for a fellow with two years of college life behind him—but be careful, Blessy, dear, that you don't let him scare the piccaninny into fits. The hazing spirit can't always be trusted for moderation. First-rate idea, though—first-rate. '*Similia similibus curantur*,' you know. I always told you you 'd come over to homeopathy."

At this moment the slim figure of Levi darted from the back door below, in the direction of the cherokee hedge, and even the servants who had collected on the kitchen porch, seeing him, ceased their whispering.

The little fellow was not without fear, as his swift steps indicated, and he had just begun to whistle when there loomed before him the great stalking grayness which, with a noiseless shift, placed itself directly in his path.

The apparition was very close to him when he saw it—and fell back.

"Who dat?" he gasped, and when the words were out, he was full ten feet away and trembling—but he did not turn.

"Who dat?" he repeated, as the thing advanced, moving a dim, opalescent head forward and back, as it came.

The situation needed relief, so that it was well when Charity scolded, from the gallery:

"What de matter wid you, Levi? Why don't you run along an' shet dat gate?"

But the boy was fixedly gazing before him.

"De ghos'! Aun' Charity, de ghos'!" His faint voice went out in a shriek.

"Ghos' nothin'!" exclaimed the woman. Still, when she said it, she had come down and stood near the boy.

"Whar any ghos'? I don't see no ghos'!" she kept saying, and while she spoke she swept her arm forward, actually brush-

"De ghos'! Aun' Charity, de ghos'!"

ing aside the folds of the floating draperies with her fingers.

This was too much for Levi. It was the finishing touch.

"Don't see no ghos'?—an' you techin' 'is skin?" The boy dropped to his knees now, for the gruesome thing had suddenly begun to speak.

"I come after young liars!" The voice was sepulchral and remote as if made by a cold wind driven between bones.

Levi tumbled completely over backward, but recovered himself, standing considerably farther back. But his fascinated gaze did not leave the ghost, and as it began to advance again, he maintained his distance, backing blindly.

"A—young—liar. A young LIAR, I say!" and, with a low dart forward, "I say, is this a young liar?"

"Y-y-y-yassir!" stammered the boy.

"Yas, sir, what?"

"Y-y-y-y-yassir! I say y-yassir!" At each word Levi courtesied lower and lower, backing as he could until the spook was so near that he would have taken to his heels had he dared. When at last he had backed up against the hedge and the looming illusion towered over him, he seemed unable to speak, and only his constantly bowing head showed him conscious of terror.

It was time for Charity to come in again, and she did so with fine skill, saving the poor child from ultimate disaster without breaking the spell.

"You yo'ng rascal!" she shrieked, but he felt her near even while she derided him, "you yo'ng rascal, what you doin',—workin' yo' head dat-a-way—standin' out in de night! Better run on an' shet dat gate, befo' I whup you!"

The apparition had moved a pace or two away, making a sort of circuit of the boy, so far as possible, as he backed against the

cherokee hedge, and, as it turned, Levi followed it with pointing finger.

"De ghos'—O Lord, de ghos'!"

And now there came a chorus of protests from the servant's gallery—a prearranged feature.

"Whar any ghos'?"

"Who see any ghos'?"

"Stop yo' lyin', boy!"

"—no ghos'!"

"Better mek dat chile behave hisself, Charity."

Things move fast in the ghost country, and even while they looked, the scoffers were impressed when there began to emerge from the dim apex of the THING a column of smoke—thin at first and thrown out in spirals—then more dense, with an occasional flash and a faint crackle as of flames kindling—and then—strong but insidious, a smell as of burning sulphur—and, last of all, words again—lower, deeper than ever:

"A tender yo'ng liar—to broil for the devil's supper. The coals are red—" A flicker of crimson made good this impression, "AND THE OLD MAN IS HUNGRY! Do I see a tender yo'ng liar before me?"

"Y-y-y-yassir!" With a deep bow.

"You confess, do you? You are a young liar?"

Another bow—only.

"And are you going to QUIT?"

Levi turned almost inside out at this, so eager was his assent.

"One—more—chance!" The voice was low and vibrant and, for the first time, almost human in a note of relenting.

The THING began to move away, but before it turned into the thicket it turned once more.

"Going to quit, are you? Then salute your master!"

Down on the ground went poor Levi,

his forehead in the dust, and when he raised himself, there was no one there. But a dull thud, like a muffled explosion from the thicket, followed by several flashes of colored light and a burst of smoke, held him spell-bound so that Charity called out, from the upper porch, now:

"Run along, boy—an' shet dat gate—an' stop yo' foolishness."

This seemed for the moment to bring him to himself. Without hesitation he ran to the end of the lane, closed the gate as originally directed, and in a moment was back again, but, instead of joining his companions in the kitchen, he hurried to the mistress, and without ado made a clean breast of his fault.

"I done quit lyin', Missy!" he said bravely, short of breath as he was from the ordeal and the run; "I come to tell you."

"Then you confess you have lied—and you have never seen the ghost?"

"Not no no-haid ghos', no, ma'am! Yas 'm, I is lied about him—an' I ain't nuver gwine do it no mo' Missy, befo' Gord! Nuver is!" He came a little nearer now, and dropped his voice quite down to the mystery pitch.

"But I sho is got de sperityal sight, Missy," he whispered, "an' I is seen one reel—*reel ghos' to-night! Befo' Gord, I is!* Don't keer ef Aun' Charity do whup me for it—I sho is witnessed de visiom to-night—a speakin' sperit! He come for me—an' he on'y let me off, caze I promised I would n't nuver tell no mo' lies—" He even came nearer as he added below his breath:

"*An' I ain't, Missy! So he'p me!*"

And, so far as any one knows, he never broke that earnest, breathless promise.

When the excitement was well over and the negroes had dispersed, the man of the house remarked, as he lit another cigar:

"Has it occurred to you, Blessy, that in all this particularly crucial experience the Liar is literally the only person who has spoken the truth? A rather interesting feature, don't you think?"

The little woman laughed.

"Yes, you 'd better believe, I thought of that! And I wondered if you would notice it. You are a discerning man, dear. That 's why I married you. I mean, that 's why *you married me.* But, jesting aside, as to our not speaking the truth in this instance, remember, we were working in the interest of truth, all the same. And besides, for myself, I suppose it is infantile, but I did save myself, technically, by declaring to myself that I really did n't see any *ghost* —which was literally true. And that was all I ever said while everybody else was denying the whole thing, needlessly—but, anyway, dear—now, don't laugh at me, but really, you know it was *medicine.* You said your-

self, it was a case in homeopathy—and all your old homeopathic remedies are poison."

"Bravely argued for a woman of your heft, Blessy! I accept your apology—and really, I hope you have cured your patient. He is a pathetic little scamp and he was pitifully scared."

It may have been a fortnight after this when the boy, Levi, was hurrying through the house one evening that the mistress called him to her side.

"Come here, Leviathan," she said, "I have something to say to you."

His full name thus pronounced was always sufficient guaranty of a serious situation, and yet, so determined was the mistress to impress the boy that she looked keenly into his shifting eyes as she repeated, very slowly:

"—something—very—serious. And don't try to answer too quickly. Think well before you speak.

"Do you—know—anything—about—a little—cake—of sweet chocolate—which I left—here—an hour ago? Sh! Slowly, now! Where is it?"

For just a single minute the eyes of the boy traversed space. Then they sought hers—and his lip trembled.

With a pathetic movement, so infantile as to invite her tears, almost, he raised his bird-like hands and placed one over the other, upon the loose waistcoat which covered his stomach, and from the dry ineffectual motion of his lips, she knew that the word which he vainly summoned was "Here!"

He was only a little child, and motherless. The playful mistress was all woman—and childless. Without a word further, she rose and noiselessly closed the door—so that she might talk with him, differently. It was her own dainty cambric handkerchief which wiped his tears away when the break came;

and when he "showed up" in the kitchen a half hour later he looked as if his face had been freshly washed, and the cook declared that he smelt like an apothecary shop, which in this case meant that the wet place on his checked shirt-front was of real cologne; and while he was dividing a big cake of sweet chocolate among his companions, he declared that whenever he felt the need of chocolate—or cologne—or *anything*—after this, all he had to do was to "walk up like a man and ask for it."

And when they had exclaimed to his satisfaction he added:

"—an' maybe not git it. But a man don't mind dat."

THANKSGIVING ON CRAWFISH BAYOU

THANKSGIVING ON CRAWFISH BAYOU

"ACACIA BAYOU," "Bayou des Roses," "Mud Bayou," "Crawfish Bayou," "Bayou des Crocodiles," "Ague Bayou"—such were some of the pictorial names which distinguished a stream so narrow in some of its many turnings, and so shallow in all but a few remote scare-holes of supposed danger, that Black Jane's little pickaninnies played prisoner's base and last tag on both sides of it at once, stepping without fear or diminished speed from one bank to the other.

Jane, whose solitary cabin was the only human habitation realizable in its vicinity,

had herself perhaps as many names as the meager stream beside which she was rearing her numerous progeny.

She was about equally well known as "Shouting Jane," or "Jane Free," or "Unbelievin' Jane," or Jane Randolph—the last being that of her recent owners—not to mention several others which it seems hardly fair to repeat after so long a time when she may not put in her defense.

Most of these appellations are so freely descriptive as to need no explanation, and if there seems to be some incongruity among them, as, for instance, between "unbelieving" and "shouting" as applied to the same woman, it is only because of a limited knowledge of the woman and the circumstances.

Jane was typical of a somewhat exceptional class, being the daughter of a Congo negress, Mano by name, who had been a princess in her own country, and who had

brought into her slave life the strong traditions of her caste.

From the infancy of her American-born daughter she had instilled into her a resentment of slavery, and even before there was any hint of the war, or of possible emancipation, she had had the unprecedented temerity to name her child Jane Free.

Although she had acquired her Congo-English in terms of Christianity and hope, Mano remained at her heart an African and a pagan. She called herself in her own tongue by the word that meant a captive, never a slave. The Christian's God was the God of the white man. He did not know her, or, if He did, He was not a God of love or even of justice. Or, if this were not so, then He was impotent and no God at all.

As she was of necessity a woman of relations and clung to her kind, it became Mano's life habit to follow the throng to

worship, but she had ever sat among her people as one apart—sullen and protesting.

Her one concession to the religion of her environment was the baptism of her child, Jane, but those who knew her best said that she had done so merely for the bravado of having the name called out before the congregation, "Jane Free." Of course, in the circumstance, such an act was almost criminal in its suggestion, but when arraigned for it, Mano's urbane and clever defense was "I named my chile Jane Free jes caze I tooken a notion to de name. She name Jane Free-Randolph, an' ef de Randolphs ain't free, I lak to know who is."

This was a stroke of genius—this quick vocal hyphenation of the name by which she thrust the offensive word forward—for this one time only—into a connection which transformed it into a compliment to her master's people.

In giving her child the name of Randolph she was merely endowing her maternally, for she had herself always been called Mano Randolph, and preferred to perpetuate this connection to damning her offspring with the doubtful surname of an incidental, no-account father-at-large.

It would seem from this, as well as from several other idiosyncracies, that the proud Congo woman, Mano, had some of the foibles occasionally exhibited by others of royal blood.

Such had been the mother of shouting, unbelieving Jane Free, of Bayou Crapaud. This, by the way, was another of the bayou's names, one or another of which was always peculiarly fitting, according to the season or the speaker's mood.

Jane had grown up about her mother's skirts, and she had been taught to think a good deal of her middle name. She believed that it was retrospectively far-reaching and

honorable, but that it might have any prospective suggestion was as far from her mind as it had been from her mother's, until the sudden turn of events which reversed the vista for her, making her in fact a free woman in 1863.

At that time, Jane was a young mother with three children of as many distinct complexions, all answering to the proud old name of Randolph, with exactly as little and as much right to the same as their mother.

With such antecedents, and reared in such a setting, it is not surprising that Jane had grown up charged to the danger point with the spirit of revolt. Her mother, naturally endowed as a woman of faculty, had worked hard chiefly because she did not want any one to bid her work. A princess might please to labor with her hands, but she could not consistently take orders.

Jane, as is sometimes the case with the

children of great-spirited women, inherited her mother's fire without her faculty. She, too, wielded the hoe or bent over her tubs to evade the command, but her thinner wrists worked with lesser skill, and a slighter mentality held the curb of her dangerous spirit.

She had kept true to her mother's religious teachings, or, rather, to her irreligious attitude, and although she had grown up in the atmosphere of an emotional Christianity which seemed to answer all the tragic needs of her race; although she had been many times prayed over, and exhorted with tears and oratory to come into the fold, and her own wild nature had been more than once on the point of ignition, she had never, up to the time of the Emancipation, made any response. She had not even been enrolled as a "seeker," and when dragged to the mourners' bench by those who yearned for her soul's salvation, she had always

risen as she had knelt, a cold, resisting, free-born slave woman—rebellious and "sinful."

On a certain memorable day, however—a day which she would never forget—when the gong sounded at eleven in the morning instead of at noon, and all the negroes knew it to be freedom's signal, and many at the first sound fell upon their knees, Jane, sitting in their midst, suddenly sprang to her feet—she had not believed that the bell would ring until she heard it—and seizing one after another of her little children, she lifted them as high as she could reach toward heaven and, with streaming eyes, shouted "Glory!" and "Freedom!" until she was hoarse.

When she had set the children down, she sprang upon a hencoop, leapt with a bound to the top of an inverted sugar-cask, and for a quarter of an hour held her audience spellbound. God had heard the prayers of

her people—the prayers of those who had prayed and the dumb heart-throbs of such as had refused to pray. Here, at last, was an answer to the protest of her mother's life, and she, her daughter, had been slow and impatient and had not known how to believe and to wait. So she accused herself. This was surely conversion.

It was a dramatic performance throughout, and many of the old Christians, seeing Jane finally rejoicing, apparently in faith, a saved soul, began to shout with her, and "Freedom Day" on Bois d'Arc Plantation was virtually converted into a religious revival through the inspiring leadership of "Unbelieving Jane."

Many of those who had knelt had burst into tears at the first signal, a few, as she, overcome with a realization of its portentous meaning, and others trembling in fear and dread, like little children deserted in an unknown wilderness.

Many were hopeful, some even jubilant, but Jane alone of all the heart-stirred throng was absolutely sure as to her future —her mother, unfortunately, had died before the Great Day—and when a few weeks later she gathered her little ones together and started out into the world, freely following her caprice alone, she vaguely felt that it was only a question of time when she should come into her own, which is to say into a prestige befitting her traditional station in the new social order of her freed people.

She was not entirely certain, but she felt tolerably sure that she and her friends would soon have white servants, not that she cared about this particularly, but if all of her color were to be promoted, others would have to serve, of course. And turn about *was* only fair play. Many of the negroes believed this at the time of the emancipation.

If it were true, so far as she was concerned, Jane's chief regret in leaving home now was the chance of missing the triumph of being waited upon by a certain vexatious old lady, a dependent relative of her master's family, who had been exacting of her in her youth. If she could just live to have this troublesome side-curled lady, Miss Melanie Montgomery, hand her, Jane Free, a cup of tea on a tray, presenting it with the traditional dipping courtesy of the slave —well, it would have done her good. She did n't care especially about this, and yet she cared enough to think out the picture and to smile over it.

Of course, Jane's remote objective point was the city of the White House—the Mecca of the gilded dome—even though she could aspire to reach it only by slow stages, but there were several well-known and accessible sub-stations en route for the disbursement of favors.

On the day when, holding one babe in her arms and with a toddler clinging to her skirts on either side, she made known her wants at the military headquarters in New Orleans, expecting, she scarcely knew what, as an initial favor, it had never occurred to her to doubt that the paternal decree which had made her free, the heaven-inspired proclamation of "Father Abraham," would insure her welcome as a daughter in Israel. She and those of her household would soon be invited to walk in and enjoy one of the many mansions in her Father's house—the mansions in contemplation of which she had so often heard her people shout.

Such was the confusion of her mind—such the composite picture made up of fragmentary precepts gathered from religious and political teachers—fragments which had fallen upon the sensitive plate of her susceptible and irrational mind in its most impressible period and which had lain dor-

mant in her subconsciousness until touched into life by the strong currents of an overcharged atmosphere.

Never was happier coincidence than that which gave to the savior of a superstitious and worshipful people the name of Judah's patriarch, Abraham—Abraham, who had held an honored place in the salvation scheme of an oppressed and waiting people through all the ages. Imagine Lincoln with a name like Frank or Harold or Mortimer, or Chauncey!

One who knows the reverence of the African's mind, his sensitiveness to romance, to poetry, to association and to worship, can realize that in his apotheosis of "Father Abraham" he was not only honoring the redeemer of his race but fulfilling the law and the prophets.

Of course, there could be nothing but disappointment and chagrin for such as poor Jane Free, and in the press and the stress

and the rush and the crush of the thousands who had come as she, the only privilege she enjoyed as a "daughter of the kingdom"—which is to say, the republic—was that of standing in line with the pitiful row of "contraband" negroes who drew their daily rations from a government which for the time was only thus far even thus meagerly and impersonally paternal.

Jane had always been a law unto herself, free by name and nature, wilful and loving by turns, but through all more constantly maternal than anything else. Her family grew as it had begun. When there were six, several years after the war, incidentally two were of the same blood. They were twins.

But whether her ducklings were ugly or whether they developed into swans, they were her own, flesh of her flesh, and as one-parent children sometimes are to the mothers who dare admit them at all into the citadel

of love, they were dearer than life or heaven to Jane's poor infidel heart.

Of course, she had long since repudiated her one act of allegiance to the Christian God, as soon, as she rather shockingly put it, as she had discovered that He had fooled her—fooled her and made her make a show of herself on Freedom Day—called her out by a false proclamation away from home and friends and protection, telling her that she was free and then *turning her loose.*

Yes, God had fooled her. In the old days she had been called a slave, but the gifts of life had come free. Now she was written down free, and the great and growing responsibilities of her new condition enslaved her hopelessly. The number of her children or their needs, even their ailments, these had been the master's care in the old free slave days.

There was suffering, and, sad to say, there was sometimes even want in the poor cabin

on the tattered edge of the raggedest suburb of the swamp-encircled town to which she had been lured by false promises to enjoy her enslaved freedom. Yes, surely God had fooled her.

Of course there were times when she had had temporary assistance from one or another during the glamour periods of her several romances, but taking even these in the aggregate, they had been decidedly more of a tax than otherwise.

But Jane was no more an idler than she had been in the old slave times. She had always been a healthy woman, albeit she was so slender—she looked as if a sudden breeze might waft her away. But her affiliations were mainly earthward, and from the absurd little topknot, composed chiefly of calico strings,which decked her proud little head, to the sole of her nimble foot—a sole whose hollow literally "made a hole in the ground" —Jane was thoroughly alert. Indeed, it was

her boast that when she was well, all she asked was "a row o' tubs, a good bleachin'-plot o' grass, a strong clo'es-line, an' *a good-lookin' man to stan' 'longside de tubs*, and she would n't ax nobody no odds." When the spur of romance failed, she fell back upon her temper as a propelling power.

Jane had had more than one chance to marry, even in these latter days and in the face of the four, or the five, and even of the six toddling detractors of her eligibility, but her love of freedom was too all-embracing to allow her to consider such a thing.

It is possible that in a weak moment she might have consented to commit herself to life-companionship with some particular man but for what she was pleased to call "mortgaging" her children, which she had more than once declared she would never do. Indeed, on one memorable occasion, seeing a companion wrangling with an ex-husband over the disputed custody of a child, Jane

was heard to exclaim: "What I tol' yer? Ain't I warned yer ag'in' marryin'? I tell yer, sister, I would n't marry no man alive. No, honey. *My* chillen is *mine! Dey ain't no man dat dast lay a han' on one o' 'em!* Yas, Lord, an' I gwine stay a ole maid an' tek keer o' my chillen." And take care of them she did, as well as she knew how.

For the first few years of her experimental freedom she made a fair living, taking it all around, and allowing for the times when she had to lie by when ration-days were resumed, and not laying too much stress upon the few hungry periods which were really some customer's fault for not paying promptly, or for being altogether too particular and withdrawing his patronage.

Jane's mother had been a great beauty in her day, black, polished, erect and commanding, but Jane, who seemed an expression of a single impulse rather than a repro-

duction of the woman in her integrity, had never been even a pretty woman, exactly. But she was better than pretty in her unfailing picturesqueness, and she bore herself with so piquant an air that no man of her class who ever saw her failed to look at her twice, and to such as came at all under the spell of her volatile and magnetic personality she was charming to a dangerous degree.

No mocking-bird that ever tilted on a bough above her head and sang his freedom-song was more lithe and graceful than little black Jane Free, none more sweet-voiced than she when she essayed to answer him with her own.

She often sang at her tubs,—sang out whatever was in her heart, just letting it come as it would in a sort of lawless vibratory fashion, crooning or shouting according to her mood, and sometimes scarcely audibly intoning her self-communings in a voice so low that when the wind

was blowing one would scarcely have known whether it were she or the stirring of the leaves but for the rhythm which marked every movement of her sinewy body.

Indeed, when she willed it, Jane was a sort of wanton mocking-bird herself, and in her love-making periods, when it was her pleasure to give herself full expression, she often mockingly sang the religious hymns of her people, throwing her slim body with maddening abandon, shamming ecstasy or despair for the delectation of her adorer. One of her most telling performances of this sort was her rendering of the popular washerwoman's hymn of the plantation while she wrung out her clothes or stood atiptoe hanging them on the line.

"Gord walked in de gyarden in de cool o' de day."

Strongly rhythmic, it lent itself equally to the wash-board's measure or to simple emotional expression. It was the song with

which she frequently began her work—about mid-morning of a summer's Monday, the early hours being employed in collecting her bundles and getting ready.

Somehow, it seemed to have working-force in its measure while the pictorial first line was tranquilizing and pleasant.

So, with the first rub, she would start in:

"Gord walked in de gyarden in de cool o' de day—
Oh, Lord, whar kin dat gyarden be?
I 'd turn my weary foots dat way
An' pray Thee cool de day for me!"

And here, if the day were particularly warm, she would stop and mop off her face while she cried:

"Yas, Lord, cool de day, sho'!"

when, nothing daunted, she would take up the measure and go along with the refrain:

"Lord, Lord, walkin' in de gyarden—
Open de gate to me!
I 'd nuver be afeard o' de flamin' sword
Ef I could walk wi' Thee!

"Gord walked in de gyarden in de cool o' de day —
He sa'ntered 'mongs' de shrubbery,
He nuver turned aroun' to look dat way,
I wush 't He 'd watched dat apple-tree!
Lord, Lord, walkin' in de gyarden —
Ev-'ry-body knows
Dat sins begins wid needles an' pins
An' de scan'lous need o' clo'es!

"Gord walked in de gyarden in de cool o' de day —
My bleachin'-plot ain't fitt'n' for Thee,
But dat Bible gyarden 's so far away,
So, Lord, come bless my fiel' for me!
Lord, Lord, come into my gyarden,
Ev-'ry-body knows
How Eve's mistake when she listened to de snake
Still keeps me washin' clo'es!

"Gord walked in de gyarden in de cool o' de day —
Ef I could stand an' see Him pass
Wid de eye o' faith, as de Scripture saith,
I 'd shout heah on my bleachin'-grass!
Lord, Lord, my little gyarden
Ain't no place for Thee,
But come an' shine wid a light divine
An' fix my faith for me!

"Glo-ry, glory, hallelujah!
Peter, James an' John!
Behol' de light an' de raiment white!
Yo' visiom 's passin' on!"

As she approached the climax, the note of mockery in her voice would die out, and

at the last, the "Glory!" stanza, which generally found her out in the clearing, where, with arms upraised, she would lift her face to the sky, her rapt expression, as she shouted, "Behol' de light an' de raiment white!" would have deceived even the elect themselves.

And, sometimes, she would even gain a new effect by repetition of this last refrain in a tremulous lower pitch when, falling upon the ground, as if dazed by the heavenly vision, she would feign unconsciousness, lying as one dead.

Only this last, however, when a devoted admirer happened to be at hand to come and lift her. Once, lying thus upon the grass, she began suddenly to chuckle:

"Lord, I sho is one devil—I sho is! I wonder what I 'd do, ef I was to view a heavenly visiom, sho 'nough! Come, pick me up, man—an' lemme git dem earthly raiments good an' white!" And, with va-

grant arms loosely about her waist, she sauntered back to the tubs.

And then, there was the telling hymn:

"Oh, my soul, you mus' be walkin' in yo' sleep!" which she loved to sing—a religious hymn to which she recklessly added pagan lines of her own making. Also, for coquetry, and on occasions when the same would not be wasted, she irresistibly sang the quaint barn-yard jingle:

"Oh, Sister Goose is gray
An' Mister Gander 's white,
Jes so his wife, dey say,
Can find 'im, day or night,
For many a gander
Is prone to wander
An' sca'cely one dat don't meander!"

And then she would add, with a toss of her little high head:

"Better come on heah, Brer Gander, an' meander wid me whilst I empty dis heavy tub!" And the honored guest, taken in the height of a glamour season, would spring

to his feet and lend a hand, even holding his fraction of a hat in his hand, with the easy grace of a knight of old.

But there were many days when only semi-articulate crooning at the tubs fitted into nature's small noises of mating things, falling in with the droning of bees and the vibrant soughing of the trees above—the soughing of stalwart limbs, heavy with sweets of flower which sometimes sent a damaging shower of yellow pollen over a white garment, lifted for inspection. But even the washer's staccato protests and the swish of the suds as she dipped it again, failed of discord as they fell in with the harsh Locust-notes—the jarring notes which do not jar to him whose ears are attuned to nature's whole choir.

Perhaps it was thus that Jane found her standard of morality—her code, if you will. Jane was precisely as moral as the corn-stalk which nodded approval to her, over the

rail fence—the corn-stalk, planted willy-nilly in God's ground—feet in earth—blessed by the sun and caressed by the dew—the heaven-seeking stalk, fashioned for praise rather than prayer—the stalk whose whole creed is beneficent compliance—the stalk which, warm with the life-fluid, and true to nature's traditions, lightly invites a golden grain to place of equal honor in its rows of white and knows not the meaning of shame. Or of sin!

She was exactly as moral as the canteloupe vine from which she cut the too-smooth melons for her variously colored children—the canteloupe which, she explained, was "too yaller becaze it made too free wid de punkin-vines."

She was as moral, quite, as the roses, perhaps—and thought about it as little as they.

When she finally took her brood out to the old deserted cabin on Crawfish Bayou,

Jane must have realized that she was passing beyond the boundary of possible success, but there was no alternative. Her rent had long been unpaid where she was, and to have her poor belongings sold by the sheriff would have meant immediate disaster.

There would have been no use repining over the inevitable, anyway, but it was a singing-time with Jane, and not even threatened calamity had power to depress her while a certain stalwart yellow Adonis, answering to the proud name of Henry Clay, was wearing out his elbows on her wash-bench.

Henry really helped with the moving—which is to say, he took Jane's youngest two and held them beside him on the front seat of the wagon heaped with her things—it is hardly fair to refer to them as furniture—while Jane and the older children followed afoot.

Henry was a gentle-voiced fellow, some-

what younger than Jane, with no energy to speak of beyond that employed in devotion, and with so slight a sense of humor that when he had stood beside her tubs for scarcely a fortnight he blandly and without a smile began to answer to the endearing and interpretative title of "daddy" to Jane's entire brood, with whom his quickly winning personality had made him an instant favorite.

There would be no rent to pay in this last retreat. Indeed, there was not so much as a landlord in evidence, and the dilapidated roof which by and by Jane repaired with her own hands had long ago been given over to Nature. Nor had Nature been forgetful of her invitation. Upon the soft gray of the time-stained roof she had set beautiful tufts of polypodium, which sparkled like emerald against and through the festoons of Spanish moss which depended from a dying oak whose gaunt arms, first raised as in

benediction, had come to typify mortality.

Upon the shanty's inner walls were rich draperies of brocade in molds of red and yellow and green, and even purple, and beneath its drooping eaves were wrens' nests, and the snug adobe buildings of the mud-dauber wasp, and pendent brown paper homes of the yellow hornet. A few crawfish chimneys reared their tops in one corner of the hut where the plank floor had rotted away, but without the door, even crowding to its very threshold, there were clusters of little palms—palmettos—even more bristling and alert than those which are seen worshiping in metropolitan cathedrals.

It was late in August when Jane took possession, and the south end of the hut was a solid mass of overlapping greenery from which the delighted children immediately began to gather drinking-gourds with eccentric handles, which their "daddy" showed them how to cut and to polish for use.

It was a picture of luxuriance and bounty, but when Jane first stood within the door and, resting her thin hands upon the sills, looked around her, she saw only barrenness and want.

The bayou, rank with summer growths, flowed sluggishly before the door. This immediately became the family market-place, and here any morning a row of little pickaninnies might have been seen fishing for crawfish with twine string and scoop-net. At first the bait question seemed a difficulty, but it was soon found that fishing with bits of fresh beef for even so long as half a day, when the weather was not too warm, did not palpably impair their quality for second duty in the stew, which was the family's favorite luxury.

It soon became the rule that whoever lost his bait in the bayou must content himself with gravy for dinner—gravy, with, of course, his share of the crawfish.

Fishing for the day's needs

Needless to say, matters grew worse. Henry really did show a willingness to work, but his strong and shapely hands were so distinctly decorative that it is easy to believe that they were best fulfilling their design when they were rearranging Jane's topknot or picking a thorn from her foot, this last act being somewhat misleading figuratively, perhaps, although taken from the life.

Not that Henry really did not help, in his own way. Indeed, the scoop-net with which the children landed their crawfish was the work of his nimble fingers, and when Jane climbed up and mended the roof, did he not sit faithfully within and call to her, indicating the crevices through which he saw the sky, and even suggesting several improvements over her own methods of lapping the shingles? Indeed, he told the children that he would have gone up and tacked on the shingles himself but for the fact that his "Junesey" was sech a particular lady

and so hard to please that he knew he could never suit her.

There were special services that Henry performed, however, without reserve or question. For one thing, he uncomplainingly carried home the wash for his ladye and collected her money, which he spent quite paternally for the benefit of the entire family. And, indeed, he must have come into the breach as provider, occasionally, for certainly the few chickens that sometimes roosted in a corner of the sleeping-room, laid an occasional egg on the bed, and picked up a precarious living at large, must have been brought in by his hand, for they generally appeared after one of his absences between setting and rising suns "in the dark o' the moon," the time when it is proverbially good luck to move poultry.

But Henry's special talents—after his ingratiatory gifts, of course—were those of the huntsman and the fisher. The opportu-

nities to indulge the first were enough to tempt him, but unfortunately he had neither gun nor dog, but he did add to the family pot once in a while with his rod and line. The only trouble about his fishing was that the places where perch and *saccolet* were known to bite were so far from his beloved that he could rarely make up his mind to go: he was a poor pedestrian, and when he did go, she always idealized his self-sacrifice and expressed the same by laying the best of his catch upon his plate.

Since his connection with her household had not arrested the decline in its fortunes at the critical moment when a strong hand might have saved the situation, it is not likely that it would have stayed the hand of misfortune even had it continued.

But poor Henry came to a sudden and untimely end in Jane's service. One day he went out with hook and line, carrying the best of the family provisions done up in a

tin pail for his dinner, and he did not come back.

The last Jane ever saw of him was at the turn of the bayou where it led through the wood. Here he had stopped and, looking back, doffed his fragment of a hat to his lady-love and suddenly disappeared in the oak-grove. For a day or two, seeing that he did not return, and having no reason to suspect disaster, Jane was a wee bit distrustful of her mate, and she crooned a pathetic wavering plaint down in her throat—a plaint in which she told her tubs that she had "lost heart," and it was not until poor Henry's body was found, half-sunken in a pool beside a basket of dead fish, that she recovered her heart, only to declare it broken.

In his eagerness to secure her favorite fish—as well as his own—he had ventured alone into the marshes where the quicksands were. Of course, if he had been a native of

the place he would have known better, but how could a "Tuckapaw nigger" know the hidden dangers of innocent-faced little Bayou Crapaud?

Henry's funeral was a great event in colored circles, even beyond the bayou cabin which it brought into sudden prominence, for Henry had been a chief exhorter in Mount Zion chapel and an officer in its "Society for the Promotion of Widows and Orphans," an organization whose chief and obvious provision was for funerals.

It was a proud moment for the children when the plumed hearse stood before the cabin door and when they were all helped into the single carriage which followed it—the society's accommodation for its "families of the diseased"—and they moved away at the head of a procession of men with badges and women in capes and poke-bonnets, all keeping step to the music of a brass-band.

Indeed, it was a proud moment for poor Jane also, even in her bereavement—for she was really sorely bereft in this sudden clipping of her romance in its full flower. It was the only one of her life that had suffered no diminution, the others having all gone out by a gradual diminuendo scale.

How much of life's glamour might be conserved if fate always knew just when to bring in the funerals! Perhaps the overdue death is responsible for more of its hopeless sorrows than the universally lamented "untimely removals"?

For the rest of her days Jane firmly believed that in Henry Clay she had realized the ideal love of her life.

Even though it was lonely and forlorn enough in the little crowded cabin after the funeral, Jane's life was palpably enriched in the experience. In the first place—first to her in the freshness of her sorrow—she had found in it the handclasp of sympathy.

The funeral oration, delivered at the open grave, had dignified her with a prerogative of grief. Even the children, dressed in scraps of mourning contributed for the occasion by the society, had gotten their quota of sympathy in copious allusions to their "orphaned" condition. Indeed, through this accentuation of the bond, it happened that, paradoxically, it was the only transient head of the family who had left no representative within it, who was revered as "daddy" to the whole lot throughout the rest of their lives.

Between Clay and the children the early bond had strengthened with daily comradeship. He had been uniformly genial and kindly, even patient many times under pressure, and his adaptable nature had lent itself to their innocent amusements with a playful ardor somewhat rare in adults of normal mind, even in the tender condescension of *bona-fide* parentage.

Indeed, between him and Jane's youngest a particularly affectionate relationship sprang up in the long hours of the sultry afternoons while they slept side by side on the grassy bank of the bayou under the trees, and many a time, seeing the two restless from the annoyance of gnats or mosquitos, Jane had left her tubs to fetch a bit of mosquito-netting which she spread over their faces. Sometimes it was necessary to bring the two closer together within the compass of the net, and in this case she would roll Henry over bodily with her foot. The baby was apt to waken and fret if he were disturbed, but Henry's snoring would be interrupted for a moment only, even when she was obliged to waken him.

Even before the tragedy which jolted her somewhat roughly into a realization of her depleted strength, Jane had been many days far from strong. Sometimes she had even been obliged to leave undone part of an

allotted task, and now she soon came to realize that she was never quite well. So, with scarce the tempering weight of mid-life upon her, there came a sudden sinking to the lower condition of those who do not rally and must needs accept the adverse will of fate.

Even before the water of the bayou was finally condemned as unfit for laundry purposes and that which she caught in a cask from the roof had proven even worse in color, Jane had known that she must soon forsake her tubs and depend for each day's provision upon chance or the offerings of the season.

There were some very important things which were to be had free for the gathering. There was firewood, for instance, which even the children could bring in, even though they were obliged to fetch it from lengthening distances. Then there were the various volunteer growths known as "greens," such as

"lamb's quarter," and "pusley," and even thistle stalks—a good dish any one of these or all combined, boiled with a sliver of bacon for seasoning. And there were other volunteer crops which would always command a market. The blackberry season was not long, but it was profitable while it lasted, and even more so was the mushroom crop which one of the children discovered in an old pasture beyond the berry-patches.

Peddling was not quite so easy as it seemed at first, and even while she rejoiced in its cash returns Jane found herself weary and short of breath many days before her basket was empty, and there soon arrived a morning when, even after she was entirely ready to start, she suddenly knew that she would not be able to walk the distance from bayou to town in the mud, and she stood quite still for some moments, looking absently into space.

Then she slowly lowered her basket, took

from her head the roll with which she had held it in place, and sat down in her door. And presently she called her children and bade them stand in line before her.

It was hard for her to decide which one of the six she might best trust to find his way and to peddle the berries. The children saw that something unusual was on her mind, and they rather expected from her serious face that she was going to talk to them about Henry, and death, and about being good children, and so they stood off from her in mystified silence.

She had been somewhat different to them since Henry's death, sometimes talking in a way that, while it brought them nearer in affection, set them apart, wondering.

The question of which one to send was quickly settled by the children themselves, each of whom, excepting the youngest, insisting that he knew better than all the others how to peddle berries.

She had not thought of sending them all, but it was a comfortable solution of the difficulty. One knew the way, another could count money. The twins took care of each other. Indeed, for that matter, each one of the six could look after every other one, and certainly the whole lot could not be lost. She tried to avoid sending the youngest, but his three-year-old lungs and arms were too much for her resisting power and she was obliged to yield.

When all the brood had gone—the first time in many years that she was left absolutely alone—she felt that the very darkest hour of her life had arrived, but she was very weary, and having no demands upon her, she fell asleep.

She must have slept all day, for the sun was low when she was roused by the children's voices, and she had no recollection of anything since morning excepting a visit from Henry, who had stood waving to her at

It ended by her sending them all

the bayou's turn just as he had done on the memorable last day of his life, and seeing that she had not come to answer his signal, he had started back to say good-by over again.

She was sure that the footsteps she heard approaching were his until she discerned the young voices, and in a minute she was wide awake and the six were almost pitching over each other to deliver into her hands the small coins which they carried. Each little brown fist had brought her one or more, and all the six tongues were going at once, recounting the day's adventure.

Jane never knew just how it happened, but it always seemed afterward that the tide of fortune had turned for her while she slept in the doorway that autumn day. Not that prosperity had floated in on high waves, but while everything had gone out before, from this time on there was an incoming tide.

This initial step in bread-winning was the dawning of a new day for the children as well as for poor Jane. They had soon recovered from a native diffidence and easily found their tongues in the presence of strangers.

Nor were they long in discovering that a very small pickaninny can hold an astonishingly tall horse or cut a great pile of grass from the sidewalk for a coin that, if it matched in size the boy rather than the task, was still well worth the earning. And they had soon realized the much more important abstract truth that they were themselves objects of amiable regard in general, and that there was room and to spare for such as they in the great world where there are always so many little things needing to be done.

During the days when Jane sat alone in her cabin—there were not many of these days, but there were a few—while the chil-

dren went berrying or peddling without her, she did her first abstract thinking—the very first thinking that had no conscious material issue. It was from her doorway as she sat alone that, for the first time in her life, she realized the sky *as sky* and knew that it was blue.

Many a time she had studied it before, certainly, but always with a view to its promise as affecting her work or her pleasure. It had been either "clair" or "fixin' to rain"—fit for drying or bleaching, planting or fishing, or *not fit*. A changing "mackerel sky" or "a rainy moon," explained why her shoulder ached, or why her soap did not "set." Thunder out of a clear sky would make a setting of eggs go wrong and sour the milk.

She had not much imagination even in these days of physical depletion and spiritual stirring, but she wondered vaguely over the mysteries of life and death, and her

thoughts, detached from earth, took questioning shape on a background of cerulean infinity.

When first her eyes found the sky—that is, when they realized the azure space—she saw upon it, whichever way her eyes might turn, the misty outline of her lover—her lover who had figuratively been *here* yesterday and was *there* to-day.

But after a while this vision faded and she saw only the blue again, and she realized—though of course she did not realize it in the stately English of the Elizabethan period—that there were more things in heaven and earth than she had hitherto dreamed of in her philosophy.

She knew dimly, though she would have denied it even to herself, that her weakness was a vital break and that she would not be strong again. She knew, when the "visiting ladies" of one of the "white churches" came to see her, bringing parcels of old clothing

and medicine and tracts which Jane told them she could read although she did not know her letters—she knew they considered her ill and not likely to get well, but even this she rebelliously concealed from her stubborn self. She appropriated the clothing they brought, lit her pipe with the tracts, and the medicine she generously administered to any of the children who might be ailing, with a fine disregard of its character or the prescribed quantity.

She was feeling pretty blue on the evening when the children brought in the news of approaching Thanksgiving—blue and rebellious—and when she heard the word she began to repeat it aloud as if she were trying to place it.

"Thanksgivin'! You don' say! Thanksgivin'!" It was in the evening after supper, and she sat with them in the doorway. She was rising to go to bed when the word fell upon her ear, but she sat down again. The

suggestion transported her at a bound into the far past.

"Come set down in the door, chillen," she said presently. "You say to-morrer 's Thanksgivin'! Come set down and lis'n at me while I tell yer about Thanksgivin' in de ole days—in de ole *slave days* on the plantation—when we-all had to git up an' work ef we was well an' ef we was sick we stayed in bed—when Thanksgivin' dinner come to all alike—sick or well, workin' or no workin'."

Her tone was bitter when she began, but as she proceeded, describing the affluence and bounty of the old days, she finally lost the sense of contrast and warmed to her subject until the story was like a tale from fairy-land to the listening children.

It was an hour beyond the usual bedtime when she finally brought the reminiscences to an end, and the little cabin would have been quite dark but for the full moon which lit a path quite through it over the heads of Jane and the children in the doorway. She

was about rising again when little Jane, her second child, said, "An' we-all ain't never gwine have no Thanksgivin', is we, mammy?"

"No!" Jane fairly snapped. "Cert'nly not; what we gwine have Thanksgivin' fer?"

"What did dey have it fer in de long-ago time?" asked another.

"Dey had it jes to give thanks to Gord A'mighty. Dat what dey had it fer. Anybody dat 's got a flounced frock to dance in, an' music to dance by, an' somebody to dance *wid*, an' a good supper to eat when they git th'ough dancin', kin keep Thanksgivin'! Dat 's de onies way we-all kep' it. Ef yer wants to keep Thanksgivin' you got to have two things—someth'n' to be thankful *fer* an' someth'n' to be thankful *wid*."

"An' we ain't got nair one, is we, mammy?"

"No!"

" 'T would n't do to keep Thanksgivin'

on account o' dem ole frocks dat white 'oman fotched sissy an' me, would it, mammy? Dey ain't no flounces to 'em nor nothin'."

"Dey got a ribbon bow on de neck o' mine. I don' see nothin' agin dat fer Thanksgivin'," said the youngest sister. "An' de lady, she say yer don' haf to keep Thanksgivin' des on account o' what yer got, nohow. She says deys jes *blessin's* to be thankful fer—blessin's like—like—"

"Like what?"

"Like, well, *you*, mammy—an' like—I dunno what to say—like a heap o' things."

"I got a plenty to keep Thanksgivin' *fer*—but I ain't got nothin' to keep it *wid*," said the oldest boy, a twelve-year-old chap.

"I been settin' here studyin', an' I done studied out five blessin's we got.

"We got to search back'ards to find blessin's, sometimes, an' I foun' *five*. We ain't none of us took de smallpox, an' it 's goin'

de roun's—dat 's one blessin'—an' six o' Muffly's chickens turned out to be pullets an' dey gwine lay eggs fer us—dat 's two blessin's ef it ain't seven—an'—an' Buddy's measles did n't turn out to be blind measles—dat 's three blessin's. What is blind measles, anyhow, mammy?"

"Blind measles? Dey jes measles wha' don' come out, dat 's all. Eve'y little measle is de same as a eye, an' when dey don' brek out, dey calls 'em blind measles—an' blind measles, dey li'ble to kill yer."

"Dat what I say, so dat 's three blessin's—an'—I don' forgot what de yether two was. Oh, yas, I know; one was a *beautifullest* blessin'. It was, *we found daddy*—an' *had de fun'al!* Ain't dat a blessin'?"

"Ah—h—h! Well, I should sesso!" exclaimed the crowd. "We would n't 'a' got no ride nor had no music, nor nothin'."

"No—an' we would n't 'a' had no clo'es by dis time, I don't reckon. Dem ladies

foun' we-all out by de fun'al—an' brung us all we got—but dey 's another blessin' yit, I was studyin' over, but I clair forgits what it is."

Jane had been growing restless for some time, and she had risen to her feet and was standing outside the door, the white moonlight full upon her. She had not answered the children for some time, but it was not from lack of interest. The truth was, she was fairly stifled with emotion. She had coughed almost constantly all day, and she had not been strong enough to stand the strain of the painful retrospect. All her bitterness had suddenly come back to her, and she saw the utter hopelessness of her condition as she had not seen it before. She knew, as she had not clearly known, that her days were numbered, and her mental agony was almost more than she could bear.

Seeing that none of the suggested blessings seemed to make any impression upon

her, one of the children finally said tentatively:

"An' mammy, we got freedom. Ain't dat *some'h'n'?*"

"Yaas, you—got—freedom," she repeated mechanically. "You got freedom—*sech as it is.*"

Then, suddenly firing, she raised arms and face to heaven, and presently she exclaimed:

"Yaas, chillen, dat 's true. You got freedom—*freedom*—FREEDOM! Bless Gord fer freedom—*ANYHOW!*"

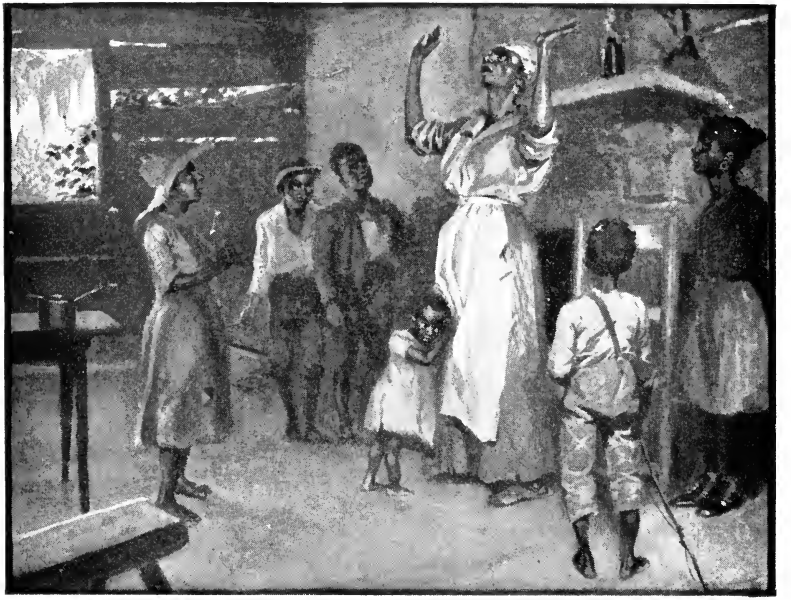
Over and over she repeated the words, striding with arms upraised, up and down before the cabin door. Then presently she stopped, and looking down upon the group, and lowering her tone so that it awed them:

"Listen, chillen!" she cried, "yer mammy got to talk to yer sometime—an' she mought as well talk to yer to-night—an' she wants you to listen good—an' don't forgit.

"You see dat white moon shinin' in de firmamint? Dat 's de light f'om above, an' it comes straight f'om heaven, an' hit 's de same as de eye o' Gord lookin' down on we-all to-night—an' ef we looks at it *straight*, maybe Gord 'll show us how to read our title clair"—this was to herself rather than to them.

"An' wid it shinin' all over us, I wants to talk to yer. I wants to tell yer dat to-morrer 's Thanksgivin' Day, an' we gwine *keep de feast!* We gwine keep Thanksgivin' in de cabin *ef we live*, so when I 'm gone, y'-all kin recollec' dat yo' mammy set de table to keep Thanksgivin' for *freedom!* Bless Gord to-night for my *free chillen!* Bless Gord dat when dey go out an' earn a dime dey free to put it in dey mammy's hand!

"Bless Gord for all de ole half-wo'e-out frocks de s'ciety ladies fetches in to he'p my *free chillen* tel' dey git a start! Bless



"Bless Gord fer freedom—*anyhow!*"

Gord for de courage He gi'e me to talk to my little chillen—in de white moonlight, to-night. Yaas, babies, we is got someth'n' to keep Thanksgivin' for—"

"But what is we got to keep it *wid?*" a timid voice asked.

"We 'll keep it wid *what dey is!* Ef Gord A'mighty looks down on us He can't requi'e us to set de Thanksgivin' table wid what we ain't got. Y'-all git up soon in de mornin' an' ketch a-plenty o' crawfish, an' mammy 'll mek a pot o' bisque for yer, an' one o' dem pullets 'll go in de stewpan, layin' or no layin', an' I 'll whup up some eggs an' molasses an' sweet potaters into a puddin' —an' y'-all kin fetch some o' dem yaller niggerheads an' wild roses for de table an' we 'll shame de devil in crawfish cabin to-morrer! Yaas, chillen, I say it ag'in: 'Bless Gord fer freedom—*ANYHOW!*' "

She was by this very much exhausted, so that she was obliged to stop and gain

breath, for she had not finished. The children had been much impressed by her dramatic manner, but as soon as she entered into the detail of the proposed feast, they had all begun talking at once, but she silenced them with an imperative gesture.

"Sh! Hush, chillen," she began, "hush, an' listen. I ain't done yit. To-morrer is gwine be a happy day—an' to-night must n't spile to-morrer, but yo' mammy 's boun' to talk to yer. You see dis moonlight? Well, some day—maybe soon an' maybe a long time comin', but *some* day, *shore*—mammy 's gwine up yander whar de moon an' stars is—"

"An' daddy?" one of the little ones interrupted. She hesitated a moment. And then she answered:

"An' peace, chillen—an' rest—an' de Father's face in de heavenly mansions. An' I pray Gord when I git dar to please, Sir, lemme lay down on a sof' mansion-bed an'

sleep. Yo' mammy 's mighty tired, chillen. An' of co'se, when I once-t goes, I can't come back no mo', so I 'm a-talkin' now, babies.

"Dat ole white lady wha' brung y'-all dem clo'es, she 's a good 'oman, an' las' time I walked into town I called in an' stopped to talk wid 'er. She 's a s'ciety lady workin' on de Lord's side—I done proved her, an' ef I was to pass up sudden—"

At this the older children began to cry, and seeing their tears, Jane laughed and veered, declaring that she had been only fooling, while she reverted again to the coming dinner.

JANE'S Thanksgiving table was the first she ever set in the bayou cabin. It had been the family habit to eat almost anywhere, the children generally taking their tin plates in their laps or often even carrying them out on the grass, when they used plates at

all, and so the table with its center decoration of flowers instantly dignified the occasion as a festive event.

Jane had sent the older children into town early in the day, recklessly giving them several of the few dimes in her pocket to spend for the "biggest watermelon they could tote," and when she had cut it into long slices and arranged them so that emanating from the bouquet they should form a star each of whose points almost touched the plate for which it was intended, the children's delight knew no bounds. They could not sit in rags at such a table as this, and so, after washing their feet in the bayou, they arrayed themselves in all that there was of finery in the cabin; some of it was tolerably good finery, too, albeit it was second-hand, and more or less eccentric as to fit.

When the feast was ready and they all stood around the table, some one proposed

a dance, and before Jane could voice her protest that they could not dance without music, the whole six had struck up a tune, some pounding the table with forks imitating drums, and others simulating the wind instruments of a brass-band, of which they gave so inspiring an imitation that Jane, fired with the spirit of fun, suddenly caught up the edges of her skirts and began to glide through the figures of an old plantation dance, turning with many a bow and smirk from one to another, and presently calling one out and another to dance with her.

It was a great time, if it was brief, and when Jane finally stopped she was so dizzy that she had to grasp the table for support, and her lips were ashen, but her eyes shone like stars.

When presently they were seated, Jane took the spoon from the soup-bowl and, hesitating a minute, laid it down again.

"In Thanksgivin' dinners, chillen," she said awkwardly, "somebody is 'bleeged to give thanks. Yo' mammy ain' no hand to pray, but— Hol' up yo' faces, chillen, an' shet yo' eyes."

She raised her own face as she spoke, not closing her eyes but looking with them intently as if imploring divine aid, and then she lifted her arms and in a low, half-frightened voice she almost whispered:

"Bless—Gord — fer — freedom — *anyhow. Amen.*"

The Thanksgiving dinner was by far the greatest event of their lives to the children. Indeed, even the funeral sank into insignificance beside it. It was so unlike anything in their previous experience that it seemed almost unreal, as if it might be a dream from which they would suddenly waken. Even their mother was not at all like herself, and more than once the older ones, catching one another looking at her, had exchanged glances.

She ate little, barely tasting the food as if for form's sake, and when she saw that the children were nearly done, she slipped away, throwing herself down upon her bed in the other room. It had been her habit of late to take naps during the afternoons and so nothing was thought of this; and indeed, when, before they had risen, several ladies came in laden with parcels, and they recognized among them their friend of the "Helpers" society, they would have called their mother to see them but that she objected.

They knew better than the children that their mother was ill and needed any rest she sought.

The table had still the festive air of a feast, but there was something almost pathetic in the absence of anything like fragments. Indeed, but for the melon-rind, a few chicken bones and crawfish heads, it would have held no hint of the nature of the meal.

The children had not been consciously unsatisfied, not having the habit of eating to fullness, and being somewhat deceived by the ocular proof that they had devoured everything in sight, but the avidity with which they made way with the slices of pie and the oranges and bananas that found their way from the visitors' baskets to their plates told rather a pitiful story. There were other things in the baskets besides food, a few articles of dress finding new owners around the table, and others being laid aside for the sick woman.

The visitors were evidently surprised to find any celebration of the day in the cabin, and, indeed, they had feared that Jane might be in bed, and had brought some wine for her. For a time they were quite mystified by the whole affair, which was altogether out of keeping with the woman as they knew her, but when the whole story finally came out, told by the lot, one supplement-

ing another and adding corrections here and there until nothing was forgotten from the talk in the moonlight the night before to the grace at table, they understood; and after they had talked until it was growing late, during which Jane had continued to sleep, one of the ladies, thinking to revive her, proposed taking her a glass of wine.

She remained some minutes in the room before she called one of her companions, and in a little while the two summoned a third to join them, and when the children would have followed, one of the ladies turned back and led them out into the open before the hut.

The days are short in November, and at five o'clock the stars were out faint but thick as diamond dust in the blue above crawfish cabin.

In a little while the visiting ladies joined the group of children and they sat together, the children fetching chairs from

the table, while some preferred to sit upon the grass.

Invited to repeat the Thanksgiving story, they went over it all again from the beginning, even to the way their mammy had looked and behaved when she spoke of going up to where the stars were.

So their friends led them on, over and over the ground, hoping to find a way to tell them how things were. Looking into the very sky whose peaceful, star-lit face had invited her tired spirit, it would seem as if it might have been easy to tell them that even then perhaps their mother was looking down upon them, happy and at rest. But these things are never easy.

It was late, and the bayou road was growing dark when finally the black-gowned lady had courage to say that she wanted the children to go home with her for the night, but when the words were once spoken the rest was simple enough. Jane had not had

a drop of stupid blood in her body, nor was a child of hers slow of comprehension.

Tears and wails are Nature's best vent for the sorrows of childhood, and when Jane's orphaned brood had wept their eyes dry they were able, even on this first night, while they walked beside their new friends and nervously clutched their hands, to look with them into the star-country and to wonder what it might mean to the guest who had just come in.

"Peace—rest—freedom"—all these she had mentioned—"and the face of the Father."

"But I spec' dat *right now* she ain't studyin' 'bout nothin' but rest," said little Jane, the second daughter. "I reckon she was mighty 'stonished when she wecked up on dat heavenly mansion-bed, arter layin' down to rest 'erse'f on dat old cabin cot."

"An' when she gits rested good, what yer reckon she 'll study 'bout fus'?" This was little Jake's question.

"I know what she 'll study about fus'. I don' think nothin' 't all about it," said Ca'line, the oldest girl. "De fus' thing she 'll do 'll be to look down to see how we-all gittin' along, and ef we so fur down she can't 'stinguish us I spec' she 'll sen' a angel to fin' out how we come on, an' when he flies back an' tells her dat we 's gwine home wid de committee ladies she 'll say, 'Praise Gord, dey 's all right! An' now, Lord, *gimme freedom!*' Dat what she 'll say."